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APOLLONIUS OF RHODES

Jason and the Argonauts

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Jason and the Argonauts

JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS

APOLLONIUS OF RHODES (third century BCE) was a citizen of Alexandria in the time of the Ptolemies. Though little is known of his life, his fame rests solely on the *Argonautica*, a poem that was from the start unfairly compared with Homer's *Odyssey*, but from which Virgil was not ashamed to borrow. Unlike Callimachus, a fellow Alexandrian poet with whom he had a long and complex history of mutual artistic emulation and innovation, Apollonius developed the classical traditions of the Homeric epic, expanding them to include a flair for romance and realistic psychological insight that was entirely his own. Some ancient sources suggest that Apollonius composed an earlier, less successful version of the poem. These sources posit that the poet retired to Rhodes and possibly there composed a more successful version. On his later return to Alexandria, Apollonius became a tutor to the future Ptolemy III Euergetes and the director of the Alexandrian Library, a principal storehouse of the literature and learning of antiquity.

AARON POOCHIGIAN earned a Ph.D. in classics from the University of Minnesota in 2006 and now lives and writes in New York City. His book of translations from Sappho, *Stung with Love*, was published by Penguin Classics in 2009. For his work in translation he was awarded a 2010–2011 grant in translation by the National Endowment for the Arts. His first book of original poetry, *The Cosmic Purr*, was published in 2012, and several of the poems in it collectively won the New England Poetry Club's Daniel Varoujan Award. His work has appeared in such newspapers and journals as the *Financial Times*, *Poems Out Loud*, and *Poetry*.

BENJAMIN ACOSTA-HUGHES is a professor of Greek and Latin at Ohio State University. He is the author of *Polyeideia: The Iambi of Callimachus and the Archaic Iambic Tradition* (2002) and *Arion's Lyre: Archaic Lyric into Hellenistic Poetry* (2010) and a coeditor, with Manuel Baumbach and Elizabeth Kosmetatou, of *Labored in Papyrus Leaves: Perspectives on an Epigram Collection Attributed to Posidippus* (P.Mil.Vogl. VIII 309). He is also a coeditor, with Luigi Lehnus and Susan Stephens, of *Brill's Companion to Callimachus* (2011).

APOLLONIUS
OF RHODES

Jason and the Argonauts

Translated by
AARON POOCHIGIAN

With an Introduction and Notes by
BENJAMIN ACOSTA-HUGHES

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Introduction

1. THE POET

Apollonius of Rhodes was a poet and scholar who lived under the rule of the early Ptolemies in Alexandria, Egypt, in the third century BCE. Alexandria was a new city; founded by Alexander in the course of his Egyptian conquest (331 BCE), the city was drawn up on one of the mouths of the river Nile near Naucratis, an early Greek *emporion*, or trading post, on the Mediterranean. Thus, unlike Pharaonic cities such as Thebes (Luxor) or Memphis, Alexandria looked to the north, and the history of this city under Ptolemaic rule was one of engagement with the Mediterranean world. The Macedonian general, now king, Ptolemy I Soter made Alexandria his capital around 300 BCE, transferring there the body of Alexander the Great from Memphis, capital of the Pharaonic New Kingdom. The movement both toward Europe and from Egypt is representative of the mixed cultural heritage that quickly characterized the new city, and that has recently been confirmed by a series of spectacular maritime archaeological discoveries in the Mediterranean off the Egyptian coast. To Alexandria came settlers from many parts of the ancient Mediterranean world, the larger groups being from Macedon, home of Ptolemy I and much of his soldiery; Cyrene, an old Greek city-state some five hundred miles to the west (in modern Libya); the Aegean islands; the Peloponnese; and Athens. Unlike earlier Greek *poleis*, or city-states, this new, post-Alexander capital consisted from its instantiation of people from a variety of backgrounds, bringing with them the cultural memory of their own dialects, religious festivals, and local heroes. Much like a modern metropolis, Alexandria was something of a melting pot of a variety of ethnic groups and a blending of disparate traditions. One exemplary product of this new world, a world of a new kind of multicultural syncretism and new geopolitical spaces, is Apollonius' modern "take" on an age-old saga, the *Argonautica*.

Our knowledge of Apollonius' biography comes primarily from two much later *Lives* that are included in the manuscript tradition of scholia (learned notes) to the *Argonautica*, circumstantial evidence, and a good deal of speculation, some of which has (unfortunately, in some regards) passed into conventional scholarship and is easily accessible to the modern student. What we know more or less for

certain is that Apollonius was a tutor to Ptolemy III Euergetes, who succeeded to the Egyptian throne on the death of his father, Ptolemy II Philadelphus, in 246 BCE. According to the ancient testimony, he also served as the second royal appointed head of the Alexandrian Library, although we have no way of knowing exactly what the title τῆς βιβλιοθήκης προστάτης (“figure in charge of the library”) may actually have entailed, and recently some of the ancient evidence has been contested. Apollonius is thought to have been born in Alexandria. Why he acquired the epithet “the Rhodian” is a matter of speculation. The ancient lives reference a close relationship to his fellow Alexandrian poet Callimachus (he is said to be the latter’s μαθητής or “student”), with whom he certainly has a much intertwined artistic rapport (see further below).

Only one of Apollonius’ poetical works, his *Argonautica*, has survived intact (it has come to us in a manuscript tradition, i.e., a heritage of texts that were copied for many hundreds of years by hand, that includes the *Homeric Hymns*, Callimachus’ *Hymns*, and the much later *Orphic Argonautica*). Of his other poetic output, we know of a *Canopus*. This presumably dealt with the legend of Canobus, helmsman of Menelaus, and the foundation of a city with his name east of Alexandria, which now lies underwater (the Bay of Aboukir). Apollonius also authored several foundation poems, one of Alexandria, one of Naucratis, and one of Rhodes (this may have had to do with the epithet “of Rhodes,” which conveniently now differentiates our poet from a later “librarian,” Apollonius the Eidographer (“compiler of forms”). There are extensive scholia that have survived with the *Argonautica* (originally these were written on separate papyrus rolls, but with the appearance of the codex, more like the modern book in form, they came to be included in the margins of the text). These scholia reference, for several lines in the first book of the four-book poem, a *proekdosis*, or “previous version,” of at least this first book, and give alternate readings. We don’t, in fact, know enough about the circumstances of publication in third-century Alexandria to be able to say that we are talking about an earlier “edition,” only that there was some sort of “previous version” of the poem’s first book.

The knowledge of an earlier version of the *Argonautica*, and of some sort of close relationship with his near (if somewhat older) contemporary Callimachus, gave rise early on to a narrative of rival artists and rival art forms. In fact, the two poets show a remarkable awareness of each other’s work, apparently over a considerable period of time. It may be more helpful for the modern reader to consider their similarities rather than their differences, particularly in the case of Apollonius’ extant four-book hexameter poem, his *Argonautica*, and Callimachus’ fragmentary four-book elegiac poem, the *Aetia* (“Origins”

or “Causes”). Both poems transform a vast amount of earlier material, from both poetry and prose, into a new or different use of a traditional poetic form (whether hexameter or elegy). Both poems are interested in *aetia*, in the limits of Ptolemaic geography, and in divine retribution of human transgression. In terms of their poetic forms, both poems recast a traditional relationship of poet and source(s) of divine inspiration, markedly eschew a purely linear narrative, and close with the type of hymnlike language that is traditionally characteristic of hymn. The points of contact between the two poems, whether shared subject, shared source of allusion, or cross-reference between the works, are legion. It is clear that the two poets knew each other’s work in the course of composition and over a period of time, though many details of how this dynamic worked remain unknown. In some respects the association of contemporary artists today in other media, whether painting or music, provides a helpful model for thinking of the interrelationship of these contemporary Alexandrian court artists: at issue is contemporaneity rather than chronology.

We find a similar situation with another contemporary poet, Theocritus, who is of Sicilian origin but spent much of his artistic career in Alexandria. Theocritus clearly paid great attention to Apollonius’ poem. Two of Theocritus’ *Idylls*, 13 and 22, respond to episodes that occur at the end of *Argonautica* 1 and the beginning of *Argonautica* 2, respectively. I would argue that the relationship is closer than has been previously understood. Theocritus’ *Idyll* 2 is another instance of this close response (here to Medea’s infatuation with Jason, and specifically to Apollonius’ use of the lyric poet Sappho), and also there is a close relationship between the narrative frame of exchange and the *ecphrasis* (description of an art object) in *Idyll* 1 and the opening of *Argonautica* 3. Again thinking in terms of tight chronology here, albeit a traditional approach to these artists, may not be the right paradigm. At issue seems to be a close association and awareness of each other’s creative activities over time, which, given the context of a royal court with extensive royal patronage, is perhaps unsurprising.

2. THE POEM

The saga of the *Argo* and its heroic voyage is of great antiquity, and may go back to an earlier period than even the Homeric poems, to ancient Near Eastern narratives of sea voyages around the Black Sea. At the heart of the saga, as the German scholar Karl Meuli observed in his 1921 study of the *Odyssey* and the *Argonautica*, is a simple folk-tale motif, the young prince sent on a dangerous journey to the land of the

Sun (i.e., to the farthest east) to achieve a heroic end, which he can only do through the aid of a local princess. The *Odyssey* is the earliest Greek text that is aware of this legend: in the opening of the twelfth book, as the magical enchantress Circe recounts Odysseus' future journey to him, she tells him of the Clashing Rocks (lines 69–72) through which only one ship has ever passed before, the *Argo*, "subject of care for all," because of Hera's love for Jason. Yet although the saga itself, with its motif of a hero aided by a goddess sent on a daunting quest, would seem an ideal theme for heroic epic, no known epic *Argonautica* has survived, and, given the silence on earlier epic poems in the rich Apollonius scholia, it is possible that none had survived to the time of Apollonius. It is not inconceivable that, for Apollonius, the composition of an *Argonautica* in hexameter may have been more of an innovation than a gesture toward established tradition, thus making the poem as an artistic composition, like Virgil's *Aeneid*, something quite new.

Earlier treatments of episodes, or more, of the *Argonautica* in other poetic forms certainly did exist, however. Jason figures in Hesiod's fragmentary hexameter *Catalogue of Women*, and treatments of the legend in lyric poetry are remarkable. These include extensive fragments of the poets Ibycus and Simonides, and particularly Pindar, whose fourth *Pythian Ode* has a lengthy treatment of the myth at its center. As the one extant lyric treatment, the influence of this model on Apollonius' poem can be traced in considerable detail. All three of the major tragedians treated material from the *Argonautica* narrative. Aeschylus composed a number of plays that treated themes from this narrative, among others an *Argo*, a *Lemnian Women*, a *Phineus*, and an *Hypsipyle*. Sophocles composed a *Medea*, a *Lemnian Women*, and a *Phrixus*. A lost play of particular interest for reading our poem would have been Sophocles' *Women of Colchis*. Euripides composed a *Hypsipyle*, of which considerable fragments survive, and of course his fully extant *Medea*. This last often reflects back on the journey of the *Argo*, famously in the tragedy's opening lines, but Apollonius was not composing his *Argonautica* with this play alone or particularly in mind. The long fame of Euripides' *Medea* is another story—it is one of many possible tragic models for the Alexandrian poet.

Among the many sources Apollonius interweaves into his epic poem are historical and philosophical ones. The former include Herodotus on Egypt (the second book of Herodotus' *Histories*) and Xenophon's description of Black Sea geography in *Anabasis* Book 5. Several images in Apollonius' poem implicate the pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles, and, like other Hellenistic poets, Apollonius appears to be particularly drawn to Plato's erotic dialogues.

Apollonius was not only a careful reader of Homer, but a Homeric

scholar: his knowledge of and sensitivity to the Homeric epics is pervasive throughout the *Argonautica*, and this manifests itself in a variety of ways. His poetic language is replete with rare Homeric words, including those whose meaning was doubted by Apollonius' contemporaries. His use of these Homeric words is frequently his own way of asserting their correct definition. Apollonius' similes are his own elaborations or variations on Homeric ones. And Apollonius is acutely aware of Homeric narrative lines in constructing his own. Let us consider one example, the sixth book of Homer's *Odyssey*. The narrative of this book is fairly linear. Odysseus arrives at Scheria (land of the Phaeacians) and, at the end of *Odyssey* 5, burrows down, alone, like an animal (his lowest point before he begins his reintegration into human society), by the riverside. Book 6 opens with Athena appearing in a dream to the daughter of the local king and queen, Alcinous and Arete; the dream compels the princess Nausicaa to take the washing to the river. There the princess and her maids play with a ball and the poet compares the girl to Artemis amid her attendant nymphs. A ball thrown and then missed wakes Odysseus. He then supplicates the young princess, and compares her to a tree. She tells him that only on his kneeling as a suppliant to her mother, the queen, Arete, can he be safely accepted among the Phaeacians. Apollonius reworks every moment of this episode into *Argonautica* 3–4. At the conclusion of *Argonautica* 2 the Argonauts wait among the reeds at the river Phasis. At the opening of *Argonautica* 3 the gift of a ball is the original cause that sets the erotic narrative in motion. Medea goes forth from town with her attendants, and the poet compares her to Artemis with her nymphs. Medea awaits her first meeting with Jason as her maids play, and here there is no ball, as that figured earlier in this book of the poem. In their first meeting the poet compares the two to silent trees. Later in the poem they come to the island of Aia, where Circe (enchantress of the *Odyssey*, and Medea's aunt), on having a nightmare, comes to the water to wash her clothing. On arrival at Scheria in flight from the Colchians, it is through Arete's actions that Medea's safety is ensured.

One area where we repeatedly observe Apollonius' own enhancement, or variation, on Homer is in his similes. Similes are a central feature of Homeric narrative. Plainly put, similes make the intangible tangible for the poem's audience. For example, the military prowess of a mythohistorical hero, a figure distant in time and space, when compared to a ferocious beast that preys on flocks and terrifies shepherds, becomes more "vivid," or "present," for the narrative's listener, who can, through the comparison to what he or she knows through experience, or through common knowledge, then better imagine what is going on in the narrative. Similes in Homeric poetry

are of many kinds, among them human to nature, human to art object, human to divine, and human to human (Odysseus' weeping in *Odyssey* 8 compared to the weeping of a woman widowed in war and about to be led off to slavery). Some are simple, and easily repeated (e.g., military hero to lion); others are rather more complex both in composition and in their meanings (the previously cited comparison at the end of *Odyssey* 8 would be a good example of the latter). In Apollonius' poem, which, unlike the Homeric poems, is *not* the product of an oral poetic tradition, and lacks many of the features of that tradition (repeated epithets, formulaic lines, repeated short similes), similes are not only complex but also generally are implicated in multiple ways in the surrounding narrative.

Let us consider two examples. The comparison of Jason as Medea beholds him at *Argonautica* 3.1239–50 to Sirius, the Dog Star of late summer, not only emphasizes his physical beauty in the girl's eyes, but at the same time denotes great foreboding for her; this love has great destructive force. The comparison at *Argonautica* 4.203–18 of Jason cavorting with the golden fleece to a young girl admiring her dress in the moonlight not only highlights sensual pleasure in material in both cases, but both emphasizes Jason's physical allure and also brings his stature *qua* hero into an odd light. While the heroic Medea pacifies the horrific monster, Jason prances in the moonlight. The moon, Medea's companion throughout the narrative of her nights troubled by erotic visions, and the scornful celestial body that watches over her night-time flight from home and family earlier in the book, here reappears in a comparison that likens Jason's radiance to that of a young girl's dress, and frames an epic hero in a setting of sensuality and something rather like decadent irresponsibility.

There are many individual moments throughout the poem, both larger and smaller, that recall moments in the Homeric epics. Apollonius can certainly be read as an extraordinary act of reception of Homeric epic, but he is not derivative (and here some prejudices of earlier scholarship on the Alexandrian poem continue to echo in modern criticism). His engagement with Homer is anything but one-sided: the *Argonautica* questions, furthers, enhances, alters its Homeric models; its reading next to Homer is at once an act of attraction and disjunction.

Modern criticism of the *Argonautica* has foundered on several of the poem's novel features. One is of course the "difference" from Homer. Many of the standard features that the Homeric poems owe to an oral narrative tradition, formulaic epithets and repeated set scenes among others, are missing in Apollonius' poem. As already observed, there is a distinctly different mechanism in the use of simile. The portrayal of the gods, and their appearance in the poem, is markedly different

from Homer. In the Homeric poems the gods serve a variety of functions within the poem, as metaphor, as directional movement (the passage of a divine figure from Olympus to Earth and vice versa changes the scene of narrative focus), and in the *Iliad* in particular as lighter and deathless contrast to the grim realities of war on the battlefield. Generally gods in the Homeric poems interact with mortals in disguise, even in dream sequences. Appearances of the gods in the *Argonautica* are quite different, and consciously play on Homeric convention. The one extended scene on Olympus (the opening of Book 3), in some ways a reworking of several scenes from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, is at the same time unlike any scene in Homer: Homeric Olympus does not allow for this kind of portrayal of domestic intimacy. There are two extraordinary moments in the poem when the heroes actually see the god Apollo as the god Apollo. And when gods intervene in the Apollonian narrative, as Athena does when holding back the Clashing Rocks, they do so as anthropomorphized divine forces.

A major problem for modern criticism of the poem is the portrayal of Jason. Admittedly our first encounters with Odysseus in the *Odyssey* (the hero on the beach weeping with longing for his homeland) and Achilles in the *Iliad* (the hero on the beach lamenting to his mother of his mistreatment by Agamemnon) are not high moments in epic heroism, but these moments fit within a code of epic-heroic expectations: the hero in isolation, the hero dishonored. Jason is more complex, and, quite arguably, more problematic. The Argonauts' initial choice of Heracles to lead the expedition is only the first of a series of moments in which Jason's leadership is cast in doubt either by other Argonauts or by the poet's descriptive language. Jason is frequently characterized as *amekanos*, "resourceless," "at a loss." His first action in battle is to kill his host Cyzicus, king of the Doliones, albeit in error, but the action remains problematic. The hero who steps forward to fight the savage Amycus at the opening of Book 2 is not Jason but Polydeuces. Jason *does* succeed at the superhuman tasks assigned by the Colchian Aeëtes, but only through Medea's magic. And, as already observed, Jason's prancing about with the golden fleece is an odd reflection of traditional heroism.

To be sure, Jason has his defenders. Indeed, defenses of Jason are something of a small industry in Apollonian scholarship.¹ And the argument can indeed be made that here, as with Aeneas (though in some ways differently), at issue is a more modern, more complex type of epic hero. Certainly there are some factors that set Jason rather apart from his Homeric predecessors. One is without doubt the role of Jason's erotic appeal, already present in the Lemnian episode in Book 1, and at the center of the drama of Medea's psychological struggle in

Book 3 and the opening of Book 4.² Only Paris in the *Iliad* is similarly characterized, but he has a somewhat circumscribed role in that poem.³ Jason's beauty is the object of an eroticized female gaze, and, particularly in the case of Medea, this leads to extensive internal psychological reaction.

Jason is also a different kind of leader, one whose diplomacy is called repeatedly into action. Here one reading of Jason would be not so much as a hero of traditional epic as a reflection of the needs, and realities, of a modern monarch. Apollonius is a court poet who composed his poetry at the court of one of the successor kings who followed Alexander's campaigns, which transformed the ancient Mediterranean world into a series of competing dynastic monarchies. The *Argonautica*, and the figure of Jason himself, can be read against this immediate historical backdrop, and the relations of the male power figures in the poem can be understood in light of the political and military struggles of the Ptolemies, the Seleucids, the Antigonids, and other successor kings.

Similarly Medea's character, and the dominant role that she takes in the last half of the poem, can be read against a recent history where powerful women, among them Olympias, Alexander's mother, play central roles in the unfolding of political and dynastic (and even military) events that are far different from those of the archaic and classical periods. A recently discovered text from this period, a series of epigrams now attributed to Apollonius' near contemporary poet Posidippus of Pella,⁴ is of particular interest here. The collection of hitherto almost entirely unknown short poems focuses largely on women in a variety of conquests, including as queens and subjects of victory celebrations. As several scholars have observed, Medea becomes a different sort of hero in the latter half of the poem. Whereas Jason's psychological processes are rarely touched on, the inner workings of Medea's mind, her dreams, her fears, her frightened inability to control her emotions, are all given considerable scope in the poem's third and fourth books. A particularly revealing moment is her interchange with the enchantress Circe in the fourth book, where Medea and Circe communicate in their own language. This moment sets Medea in the role of Odysseus, who seeks Circe's aid and whose particular relationship with Circe sets him apart from his followers. In the final combat with an otherworldly figure, the giant Talus, it is Medea whose magical knowledge is victorious, as is true with the dragon that guards the golden fleece, and of her "creation" of Jason as the hero who slays the earthborn men.

At the time of the *Argonautica*'s composition, the Ptolemaic Empire covered a vast geographical space, extending from the Cyreneica in the west (modern Libya) to Coele-Syria (modern Israel, Palestine,

Lebanon) in the east, much of southern Asia Minor, and many Aegean islands.⁵ The Ptolemies were further major players in the political world of mainland Greece, where they served as a counterweight to Macedon. The new epigrams attributed to Posidippus include a number of poems dedicated to early Ptolemaic queens, several of which, poems that celebrate victory in horse racing at Nemea in the Peloponnese, attest to the actual presence of individual royal family members at the games. Apollonius' *Argonautica* can be understood in one sense as a four-book travel narrative, one that takes its point of departure from a long-ago saga that told of a journey from Thessaly through the Propontis and around the Black Sea (an older trajectory). The poem then, in its long last book, brings the poem's audience (the newer trajectory) along the Danube, then down the western Adriatic coast, back up the Adriatic to the Po in Italy, to the Rhône in France, to Libya (importantly, the setting of the prophetic oracle of Zeus-Ammon at the Oasis of Siwah, where Alexander had been proclaimed son of Zeus), to Crete, and thence back to the Greek mainland. Apollonius' mapping of the Argonauts' return brings the heroes of the *Argo* through areas that were relevant to the Ptolemaic Empire with its vast naval fleet, a different Greek world from that imagined in the ancient saga tradition.⁶ From the perspective of the ancient saga, this return involves a journey into the unknown. This journey may be in part a reflection of the expeditions that took place under the Ptolemies to Nubia, and particularly the Arabian Sea. The quest narrative of the original legend (a young prince is sent to the land of the Sun in search of a magical object, and is aided in that quest by a local princess) finds real-life parallel, as it were, in the early Ptolemaic quest for more widespread hegemony and control of the import of luxury goods.

While the *Argonautica* is, on the one hand, an epic hexameter poem heavily imbued throughout by Homeric and Hesiodic tradition, it is, in other ways, quite new, and to a modern reader, particularly one coming to the poem without much experience of its earlier models, may read much more like Tolkien in poetic form than anything else. And this would perhaps be right. In its combination of the real and the fantastical, its engagement with traditions of medicine, astronomy, and science, its magical vessel that speaks and yet serves as the plaything of water nymphs, heroes that have wings, and a king whose grandfather is the center of the solar system, it is truly without exact parallel in previous or contemporary Greek literature. The *Argonautica* has its detractors, and has long had its detractors, but for those who admire the poem, even on multiple rereadings, it is an experience close to magical.

Notes

1. Clauss 1993 is an excellent and accessible study of this issue.
2. There are a number of studies on the role of Eros in the *Argonautica*. A particularly good one is the second chapter of Richard Hunter's 1993 literary studies of the poem.
3. Here the portrayal of Paris in two poems of the Trojan cycle, the *Cypria* and the *Little Iliad*, may have been contributing factors to Apollonius' portrayal. Neither poem, however, has survived.
4. These are available in English in the translation of F. Nisetich in Gutzwiller 2005.
5. On the Ptolemaic naval empire see now Bursalis, Stefanou, and Thompson 2013.
6. Thalmann 2011 is an excellent and proactively new study of the poem in these terms.

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A Note on the Text and Translation

Based on the edition of Francis Vian and Émile Delage (published from 1974 to 1999), this is an unabridged English translation of Apollonius of Rhodes' ancient Greek epic *Argonautica* (*Jason and the Argonauts*). My intention with this project was to create the most engaging and readable translation of the poem available.

Given its large cast of characters and vast geographic scope, *Jason and the Argonauts* is rich in proper nouns. I opted for the Latin spellings of Greek names because they look less foreign to the reader and are more likely to be recognized. Thus, Zeus' father is "Cronus" and not "Kronos," and Aphrodite is given the title "Cypris" instead of "Kypris" so that her connection to the island Cyprus would be clear. I translated Greek names that end in the letter *eta* with the Latin *a* ("Athena" instead of "Athene" and "Zona" instead of "Zone," for example) to clarify their syllable counts. I did, however, allow for exceptions where the names are standard in English with an *e* ending: Alcimede, Antiope, Aphrodite, Arete, Ariadne, Chalciope, Circe, Cleite, Cyrene, Dicte, Hecate, Helle, Hypsipyle, and Terpsichore. I include diaeresis (

original are provided in parentheses to facilitate cross-reference. In short, I have done all that I could to make this translation as reader- and scholar-friendly as possible.

I have felt for years that *Jason and the Argonauts* needed a verse translation in which the poetic rhythms reinforce syntactic units, as do the rhythms of the original, and in which the electricity of language we expect in poetry is sustained. I hope I have achieved these goals. My models were the great blank verse epics of the English language: John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Alfred Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. Iambic pentameter has the advantage of being familiar to the English ear, as dactylic hexameter, the meter of the original, was to the ancient Greek one. Given the longer lines of the original and the compression of ancient Greek, my translation averages fifteen lines for every twelve of the Greek.

Again and again in *Jason and the Argonauts*, poetry works magic and effects rapture. For example, Apollonius informs us that, while Zethus, one of the founders of Thebes, struggled under the rock he was lugging to build the city walls, his brother Amphion "simply strolled along behind him / and strummed his golden lyre, and a boulder / twice as gigantic followed in his footsteps" (Book 1, 994–96). The mythic father of poets, Orpheus, is, in fact, one of the Argonauts, and we are told that he could "soften stubborn / mountain boulders and reverse a river's / current with the seduction of his songs" (Book 1, 39–41). The effect of his music on humans and animals is mesmerizing. We learn that, when Orpheus strummed his lyre from the deck of the *Argo*, "fish both big and small came leaping out of / the sea to revel in the vessel's wake" (Book 1, 774–75). At the conclusion of his song to the Argonauts around the campfire, we find the following description:

So Orpheus intoned, then hushed his lyre
at the same time as his ambrosial voice.
Though he had ceased, each of his comrades still
leaned forward longingly, their ears intent,
their bodies motionless with ecstasy.

(Book 1, 696–700)

John Milton was so smitten with this passage that he all but translated it for *Paradise Lost*:

The Angel ended, and in Adam's Ear
So Charming left his voice, that he a while
Thought him still speaking, still stood fixt to hear.

(Book VIII, 1–3)

Apollonius is himself subject to the same rapt amazement. In what is,

perhaps, his most emotional insertion of himself into the epic, he expresses awe at the fact that his character Medea is able to cast a spell that brings down bronze giant Talus:

Father Zeus, profound astonishment
has stormed my mind—to think that death can come
not only through disease and injury,
but people can undo us from afar,
just as that man, though made of bronze, surrendered
and fell down underneath the far-flung onslaught
of that ingenious conjurer, Medea.

(Book 4, 2158–64)

Thus I found justification for a verse translation of the epic within the epic itself—a prose version would have captured the meaning but left out the magic. Though Orpheus, Medea, and Apollonius himself are stiff competition, I can console myself with the knowledge that I did my best to make my translation a tribute to their powers.

In addition to being thoroughly endearing, Apollonius' voice is elastic—it rises to Homeric heights, slips into the “storybook” tone of fairy tale and indulges in genealogical, mythological, and geographic asides, to which it enjoys calling attention (“wait, why have I digressed so widely, talking / about Aethalides?”, Book 1, 874–75). Furthermore, though he was head librarian at the Great Library of Alexandria, Apollonius is no mere pedant. He is as much a psychological realist as Henry James when it comes to matters of love and sex (“devastating / affection crept up over him, because / she was a maiden, crying,” Book 3, 1391–93), and his characters, especially the females, are capable of operatic pathos. Take, for example, Medea's contemplation of suicide as she decides whether to help Jason win the contest of the bulls:

I cannot hope that, even when he dies,
I will be free from anguish. He will be
a curse on me when he has lost his life.
So good-bye, modesty. Good-bye, fair name.
Once I have saved him, let him go unharmed
wherever he desires while I, the day
that he completes the contest, leave this life
by dangling my body from a rafter
or taking drugs, the kind that kill the heart . . .

(Book 3, 1032–40)

Unlike Homer, Apollonius provides occasional comic relief, and sexual innuendo is not too lowbrow for his Muse. We are told that, when Medea's handmaids teased the Argonauts over the paltry offerings they were giving the gods, “the men responded / with crude

suggestions, and delightful insults / and sweet harassment sparkled back and forth / among them” (Book 4, 2227–30). It took perseverance to find a voice that could accommodate this range of modes, tones, and character voices, but I am confident the voice I found is Apollonius’ own.

For as long as I have known the ancient Greek language, I have been certain that Apollonius is a great poet and that *Jason and the Argonauts* is a great epic. My translation, a labor of love, is an attempt to convince Greekless readers that this is so. I hope that the poem becomes, like Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, essential reading for a cultured individual. This project would have been much slower reaching completion without the financial support of the National Endowment for the Arts, to which I am very grateful.

AARON POOCHIGIAN

BOOK 1

Taking my lead from you, Phoebus Apollo,
I shall commemorate the deeds of men
born long ago. King Pelias insisted,
so they drove the tautly fitted *Argo*
5up through the narrows of the Pontic Sea
and past the Cobalt Clashing Rocks to win
the golden fleece.

Pelias had received
a prophecy: a miserable doom
awaited him, a murder brought about
10by someone he would see come from the country
wearing a single sandal. Soon thereafter
the prophecy came true: that winter Jason
was fording the Apidanus at flood time
and only saved one sandal from the mud—
15 (11)the river current snatched the other one.
He simply left it in the depths and strode on
straight to the court of Pelias to take
a portion of the feast the king was hosting
in honor of his father lord Poseidon
20and all the other sacred gods, excepting
Hera the goddess of Pelasgia,
to whom he paid no mind.

Soon as the king
saw Jason, he was sure he was the man
and right away contrived a labor for him,
25a cruel voyage, in the hope that he
would die at sea or fighting savages
and never make the journey home to Greece.

Past poets have already told in song
how Argus with Athena's guidance built
30 (20)a ship, the *Argo*. I intend to tell you
the names and lineages of the heroes,
their travels on the wide-paved sea, and all
that they accomplished in their wanderings.
Come, Muses, be the surrogates of my song.

35**Orpheus** is the first we should remember.

They say it was Calliope that bore him
beneath the peak of Mount Pimpleia after
she coupled with Oeagrus king of Thrace.
The legends say their son could soften stubborn
40mountain boulders and reverse a river's
current with the seduction of his songs.

The wild oaks his lyre charmed and marched
down out of Mount Pieria still today
are flourishing in dense, well-ordered ranks
45 (29)at Zona headland on the Thracian coast—
clear proof of what his music could accomplish.

Such, then, was Orpheus, the king of all
Bistonian Pieria, and Jason
invited him to join the expedition
50just as the Centaur Cheiron had advised.

Cometes' son **Asterion** arrived
without delay. He hailed from Peiresiae
under Mount Phylleius on the banks
of the sublime but wild Apidanus
55right where it weds the noble Enipeus.
(Both rivers travel far to reach that union.)

Next **Polyphemus**, offspring of Eilatus,
forsook his native Larissa to join them.
Back in his adolescence he had fought
60 (41)beside the mighty Lapiths when they waged
war on the Centaurs. Though his limbs had since
grown burdensome, his heart remained as keen
for battle as it had been in his prime.

Since he was Jason's uncle, **Iphiclus**
65did not remain at leisure in Phylaca.
Aeson, you see, was wedded to the sister
of Iphiclus (and daughter of Phylacus),
and ties of blood and marriage left no choice—
Iphiclus had to be included, too.

70Nor did **Admetus**, king of sheep-rich Pherae,
hang back beneath the peak of Chalcedon.

Echion and **Erytus**, both ingenious

at artifice, both sons of Hermes, rushed
to leave behind the wheat fields of Alopa.
75 (54)As they were setting out, **Aethalides**,
half brother to them on their father's side,
ran out to catch their march and be the third
in their brigade. Phthian Eupolemeia,
Myrmidon's daughter, bore him on the banks
80of the Amphryssus, and Menetes' daughter
Antianeira bore the other two.

Next Caeneus' son **Coronus** left
Gyrton, a wealthy town, to make the journey.
Yes, he was brave, but not his father's equal.
85Poets recount how Caeneus went down,
while still alive, beneath the Centaurs' clubs.
All alone, separated from his comrades,
he still routed the Centaurs from the field.
When they stampeded back, they failed to break
90 (63)or slay him, so he sank into the earth,
invincible, triumphant, hammered down
by a relentless rain of pine-wood clubs.

Mopsus the Titaesian also joined them.
Leto's son had taught him how to read
95the sacred signs exhibited by birds
better than any other man alive.

Eurydamas the son of Ctimenos
came, too. He left a home in Dolopian
Ctimena beside lake Xynias.

100Actor allowed his son **Menoetius**
to leave their home in Opus, so that he
could see the world with distinguished men.

Eurytion and valiant **Eurybotes**
were also quick to join. One was the son
105 (72)of Iros son of Actor; one the son
of Teleon. (In all truth Teleon
had sired world-famous Eurybotes,
and Iros had begot Eurytion.)

Oileus joined them as a third, a man
110of giant strength and matchless at harassing
foes from behind once he had turned the lines.

Euboean **Canthus** joined them next. His father
Cerinthus son of Abas gave him leave
since he insisted on the quest. But no
115homecoming had been fated for him, no
return to fair Cerinthus. Fate had ruled
that he and the distinguished seer **Mopsus**
would wander to the farthest ends of Libya
and perish there. Wherever people travel,
120 (82)catastrophe is waiting—so those two
were laid to rest in Libya, a land
as far from Colchis as the space between
the rising and the setting of the sun.

Next came those wardens of Oechalia,
125**Clytius, Iphitus**, sons of cruel Eurytus,
to whom Far-Shooting Phoebus gave his bow.
Eurytus, though, did not enjoy it long
because he dared defy the god who gave it.

Aecus' two sons arrived at different
130times and from distant points of origin.
You see, they accidentally had murdered
their brother Phocus and had fled at once
to separate exiles outside Aegina:
while **Telamon** had claimed the Attic Island,
135 (94)**Peleus** had erected walls in Phthia.

Next, from the land of Cecrops came the soldier
Boutes, the son of noble Teleon,
and with him came the staunch spearman **Phalerus**.
His father Alcon let him go. Although
140there were no other sons to tend his age
and mind the homestead, Alcon all the same
sent him—his only heir, his best beloved—
to win renown among courageous heroes.

(Though Theseus was mightier than all
145the other offspring of Erechtheus,
he never came. Invisible restraints
detained him in the earth beneath Taenarus
where he had traveled with Peirithoös—
a wasted trip. They would have made this quest
150 (104)much easier for everyone who sailed.)

Tiphys the son of Hagnias forsook
Siphae, a Thespian harbor town, to join
the heroes' party. When it came to knowing
when breakers would disturb the sea's expanse,
155anticipating stormy gales and plotting
course headings by the sun and stars, he was
a mastermind. Tritonian Athena
had packed him off to join the expedition,
and his arrival cheered a crew in need
160of naval knowledge. After she designed
the speedy ship, Argus, Arestor's son,
had worked with her and built it to her order,
and that is why, of all the watercraft
that ever challenged ocean with their oars,
165 (114)the *Argo* was the most remarkable.

Pleias, the next to join them, had forsaken
Araethyraea where he had been living
in luxury because he was the son
of Dionysos. The estate he left there
170was very near the source of the Asopus.

Talaus and **Areios**, sons of Bias,
marched out of Argos, and beside them marched
courageous Leodocus. Pero, daughter
of Neleus, had borne all three of them—
175this was the Pero for whose sake Melampus,
Aeolid Melampus, had endured
hard sorrow in the stalls of Iphicles.

No story claims strong-willed, invulnerable
Heracles failed to answer Jason's summons.
180 (124)When he got word the heroes were assembling,
he was just crossing from Arcadia
into Lyrceian Argos, on his shoulder
a big live boar that had of late been grazing
the meadows of Lampeia all along
185the Erymanthian swamp. He slid it down,
netted and muzzled, from his massive back
there in the Mycenaeans' meeting place
and freely hastened off to join the quest
against the orders of Eurystheus.
190With him went **Hylas** in the prime of youth,
a noble squire, to bear his bow and arrows.

Next came divine Danaus' descendant
Nauplius. As the son of Clytonaeus,
he was, of course, grandson to Naubolus.
195 (135)Naubolus had been sired by Lernus, Lernus
by Proteus, and Proteus in turn
by Nauplius the Elder. Long ago
Amymona the daughter of Danaus
had lain in love beneath the god Poseidon
200and borne this Nauplius, and Nauplius
had bested all men in the art of sailing.

Of all the heroes reared in Argos, **Idmon**
came latest. Though he had foreseen his death
in bird signs, he enlisted all the same
205so that his town would not deny him glory.
Idmon was not, in fact, the son of Abas—
Apollo had begotten him on one
of far-famed Aeolus' many daughters.
Phoebus himself had taught him to divine
210 (145)future events by closely studying
bird omens and the flames of sacrifice.

Leda of Aetolia dispatched
thick-sinewed **Polydeuces** and his brother
Castor, master of swift-hoofed steeds, from Sparta.
215She bore her much-beloved sons together
as twins in King Tyndareus' palace
and, when they begged to go, she gave them leave
to prove Zeus was their sire by worthy deeds.

Two sons of Aphareus, **Lynceus**
220and firebrand **Idas**, marched out of Arena,
both of them glorying in boundless courage.
Lynceus also was endowed with vision
keener than that of any man alive.
They say that he could easily project
225 (155)his eye beams even underneath the earth.

Periclymenus, Neleus' son,
joined up as well. He was the eldest born
of all the offspring Neleus had fathered
at Pylos, and Poseidon had bestowed
230infinite strength upon him and the power
to change into whatever shape he wished

so that he could survive the shock of battle.

Next, **Cepheus** and **Amphidamus** left
Arcadia and came. Sons of Aleus,
235 they marched out of a home in Tegea,
Apheidas' estate. Their elder brother
Lycurgus had released his son **Ancaeus**
to be the third man in their company.
Yes, though Lycurgus stayed behind at home
240 (166) to tend Aleus who was weak with age,
he couldn't keep his son from setting out.
The boy wore only a Maenalian bearskin,
lugged only a gigantic ax. You see,
his grandfather had hidden all the other
245 arms and armor in the granary,
hoping to keep the lad from going, too.

Augeas also joined the voyage. Fame
pronounces him the son of Helius.
King over Elis, he enjoyed his wealth
250 but greatly wished to see the Colchian land
and King Aeëtes of the Colchians.

Next came **Asterius** and **Amphion**,
both sons of Hyperasius. They forsook
Pellena in Achaea to enlist—
255 (178) the same Pellena that their grandsire Pellen
had founded on the brow of Aegialus.

Euphemus, next, came to them from Taenarus.
He was the fleetest-footed man alive.
Europa, lordly Tityus' daughter,
260 had borne him to Poseidon. He could dash
across the whitecaps of the dull gray sea
without submersing his precipitate feet.
Only his toes would touch the liquid path.

Two other of Poseidon's sons arrived—
265 **Erginus** who had left the citadel
of glorious Miletus, and superb
Ancaeus who forsook Parthenia,
cult center of Imbrasian Hera. Both
exulted in their sea- and battlecraft.

270 (190) From Calydon came Oeneus' son,
strong **Meleager**, with **Laocoön**
Oeneus' half brother. (Yes, the men
had different mothers, since Laocoön
had been begotten on a serving maid.)
275 Oeneus sent him forth, old as he was,
to chaperone his son. Thus Meleager,
young as he was, made one among the heroes.
I suspect that, barring Heracles,
none of the men who went would have surpassed him
280 if only he had stayed another year
back in Aetolia and reached his prime.
His mother's brother came along as well—
Iphiclus son of Thestius, a man
skilled equally in close- and long-range combat.

285 (202) **Palaemonius** was next to come
and join the expedition. Though reputed
the son of Lernus of Olenia,
he was in fact the offspring of Hephaestus.
His feet, therefore, were hobbled like his father's,
290 but no one ever dared to slight his brawn
and battle skills, and so he made the roster
and added more renown to Aeson's son.

Next came Phocaeen **Iphitus**, the son
of Naubolus and grandson of Ornytus.
295 This Iphitus, you see, had played the host
when Jason went to Delphi to consult
the Pythian oracle about the voyage—
yes, it was there at Delphi he received
the hero at his palace as a guest.

300 (211) **Zetes** and **Calais** were next to join.
Orithyia had borne them to the Northwind
on the frontier of blizzard-haunted Thrace.
You see, while she was whirling in a dance
beside the eddying Ilissus River,
305 he snatched her up out of the land of Cecrops,
whisked her far away, and set her down
near the Erginus River on a crag
called "Rock of Sarpedon" today—that's where
he blanketed the maiden in a mist
and ravished her.

310 Their sons arrived on flapping,
dusky wings that grew out of their ankles
(a wonder to behold)—those golden scales,
those feathers shimmering. The jet-black braids
that sprouted from their heads and tumbled down
315 (223) across their backs kept swaying in the wind.

Even **Acastus**—yes, the very son
of stubborn Pelias!—refused to miss out
by staying safely in his father's palace.
Argus, the shipwright of Athena, too.
320 Both of them claimed their places on the roster.

Such were the men who rallied to assist
the son of Aeson. People took to calling
these heroes “Minyans,” since most of them
(and many of the stronger fighters) claimed
325 descent from Minyas’ daughters. Jason
was Minyan himself: Alcimede
his mother was the daughter of Clymena,
and she, in turn, was Minyas’ daughter.

After the slaves had placed those goods aboard
330 (235) that ships require when business forces men
to sail abroad, the heroes strode through town
to where the *Argo* stood upon a shorefront
known as Magnesian Pagasae. Though crowds
of giddy citizens had gathered round them,
335 the heroes shone like starlight between clouds.
The men who watched them marching under arms
stood wonderstruck and muttered to each other:

“King Zeus above! what’s Pelias’ plan?
To what wild tract outside Achaean lands
340 has he dispatched this large brigade of heroes?
Well, let’s assume they’re sailing to Aeëtes.
Even if he refuses them the fleece,
they could destroy his palace with consuming
fire in a single day. But, ah, the voyage—
345 (246) that’s the hard thing, not to be avoided,
a chore impossible to all who try.”

Thus were the townsmen talking, while the women
raised their hands and asked that heaven grant

a heartwarming conclusion to the voyage.
350Tears flowed as they lamented to each other:

“Poor Alcimedede, anxiety
has come to you as well, however late.
No, you have not concluded life in splendor.
And Aeson, too—he’s terribly unlucky.
355The honest truth is it would have been better
if he had wound up shrouded long ago
and stowed in earth and so remained unwitting
of this atrocious quest. I wish the waves
had swallowed, darkly, Phrixus and the ram
360 (256)along with that girl Helle when she drowned.
That baneful beast spoke with a human voice
only to cause Alcimedede distress
and countless sorrows in the days to come.”

So they commiserated as the heroes
marched to the launch.

365At Jason’s home a crowd
of serving men and women had assembled.
When his mother poured her arms around him,
poignant grief pierced every woman’s bosom.
Aeson was lying on a cot, wrapped up
370in shawls because of his decrepit age,
groaning among the women.

After Jason
had done his best to soften their distress,
he bade the slaves collect his battle gear.
They heeded the command in perfect silence,
375 (268)eyes averted. But Alcimedede,
who had embraced him when he first appeared,
refused to let him go, and only sobbed
with greater violence.

As a lonely maiden
clings desperately to a gray-haired nurse,
380her last remaining friend, and weeps because
she lives a heavy life without protectors,
only a stepmother who so assails her
with fickle insults and relentless scorn
that she cannot stop weeping, and her heart
385is bound and gagged by all this misery,
and she cannot sob out the countless sorrows
that throb within her, so Alcimedede

was weeping, weeping, and she couldn't stop.
Squeezing her son, she wailed in despair:

390 (278) "I wish that on the day when I first heard
Pelias, much to my dismay, pronounce
his cruel commandment, I had left off living
and blacked out all my woes. Then, oh, my son,
you could have buried me with your own hands.
395 That was the sole remaining expectation
I had of you, since I had long enjoyed
all other joys of motherhood. Though once
the envy of Achaean woman, I
shall now be left here like a slave to tend
400 an empty palace, withering away
with missing you, the son because of whom
I had such fame and glory in the past.
For you alone, my first and last, I loosened
my bridal sash. The goddess Eileithuia
405 (289) begrudged me many children. Ah! not ever,
not even in my dreams, did I imagine
that Phrixus' escape would prove my ruin."

So, sobbing, she exclaimed and heaved a groan,
and all her handmaids wailed in turn, but Jason
soothed her with sympathetic words:

410 "Please, Mother,
don't lay such bitter pains upon yourself,
since you will not drive off distress with tears
and may well end up heaping further sorrow
upon your sorrows. Sudden are the woes
415 the gods allot to mortals. Strive to bear
your portion of them, though it pains your heart.

Take courage from Athena's covenants,
from oracles (since Phoebus has delivered
highly favorable prophecies),
420 (303) and from the strength of heroes. Now stay calmly
here among your handmaids. Don't become
a bird of dire omen for the ship.
My friends and slaves will walk me to the shore."

So he proclaimed and set out from his home
425 to make the quest. Think of Apollo striding
out of a fragrant temple and parading

through holy Delos or through Claros, Pytho,
or level Lycia along the Xanthus—
that is how Jason strutted through the crowd.

430The townsfolk with a single voice let out
a cheer, and venerable Iphias,
priestess of Artemis the Town Protectress,
came shuffling up to him and kissed his hand.
Try as she might, she never got a word in
435 (310)because the crowd kept pressing close around him,
and she was left behind them on the roadside,
an old woman abandoned by the young,
and there was Jason shrinking in the distance.

And so he left the well-paved streets of Iolcus
440and came down to the beach at Pagasae,
and all the heroes waiting there for him
beside the *Argo* welcomed his arrival.
He stopped above the launch, and they assembled
opposite. Soon they glimpsed two men together—
445Argus! Acastus!—marching from the city.
Everyone was amazed to see them coming
in spite of Pelias' orders. Argus,
Arestor's son, had thrown around his shoulders
a rough dun-colored ox hide that was flowing
450 (325)down to his feet; Acastus, an exquisite,
two-layered cloak his sister Pelopeia
had given him. For all of his excitement,
Jason restrained himself from asking questions
and called for order, and the men sat down
455upon the furled sails and level mast,
and he proposed the course he thought most prudent:

"All the gear a ship requires for travel
has now been snugly stowed, and there's no reason
for more delay. We will be setting forth
460soon as the proper winds are blowing. Comrades,
because our journey homeward will be shared,
and shared our voyage to Aeëtes' realm,
choose freely, now, and without prejudice
who in the crew you wish to be your leader—
465 (339)some man to manage details and engage in
wars and alliances with foreigners."

So he submitted, and the young men swiveled
their eyes and stared at mighty Heracles
sitting among them, and they all insisted
470he lead the quest. He stayed right where he sat, though,
held his right palm out, and said in answer:

“No, no, let no one offer me this honor.
I won’t accept. What’s more, I will prevent
the rest of you from standing for the job.
475The man who called us here should lead our party.”

Such were his mighty words, and all the heroes
assented with a single voice because
Heracles was the one who had proposed it.
The son of Aeson jumped up and addressed
his eager comrades:

480 (351)“Men, if you have truly
entrusted this position to my care,
let nothing more delay our expedition.
Come, let us first propitiate Apollo
with sacrifices, then at once prepare
485a feast. While we are waiting for the servants
who oversee my cattle stalls to drive
the largest of them here, let’s drag the *Argo*
down to the sea, stow all the gear aboard her,
and settle which of us will take which bench
490by drawing lots. We also should construct
a seaside shrine in honor of Apollo,
the God of Embarkation, since it was
his oracle that vowed to send me signs
and teach me all the highways of the sea,
495 (362)so long as I began my expedition
by giving sacrifices in his name.”

So he proposed and was the first to take up
the tasks at hand. The others duly rose,
stripped off their clothes, and laid them, piece by piece,
500above the surf upon a flat smooth stone
sea storms had long since scoured clean.

First off,
with Argus in the background shouting orders,
the heroes ran a triple-braided cable
snugly around the ship and pulled it taut
505from either end so that the bolts would stick

faithfully in the planking and withstand
whatever violence the sea swell sent them.

Next, they industriously dug a trench
wide enough to receive the vessel's keel
510 (373) the whole way down into the sea (that is,
the total breadth of beach the ship would travel
pulled by their hands). As they approached the surf
they dug the channel deeper than was needed
to house the keel, inserted polished rollers
515 into the extra space, and tipped the vessel
onto the rollers so that she would coast
oceanward while gliding over them.

Next, they reversed the oars that stuck out starboard
and port so that the blades were on the inside
520 and handles sticking out a cubit's length.
After the stems were fastened to the oarlocks,
they stood on either side between the oars,
their hands and torsos pressed against the hull.

Tiphys had climbed on deck to tell the crew
525 (382) when it was time to push. He bellowed hugely—
that was the signal. One concerted heave,
and they had loosed the vessel from the props,
feet dancing as they pushed and pulled it seaward.
Pelian *Argo* followed in a rush,
530 the men on each side boisterously shouting
as they were swept up in its course. The rollers
squealed as the sturdy keel scraped over them.
Friction and torsion sent up coils of smoke.

After the ship had rolled into the surf,
535 they yanked landward upon the lines to check
its forward motion. Then they snapped the oar pins
into the holes, locked them, and lugged aboard
the mast, the well-sewn sails, and all the gear.

Once they had scurried back and forth and seen
540 (395) to each detail, they turned to divvying
the benches up by lot, two men per bench.
Straight off, though, separate from the lottery,
they gave the center bench to Heracles
to work beside Ancaeus the Tegean.

545After the berths were set, they gladly handed
Tiphys the tiller of the well-keeled *Argo*.

Then they heaped some stones up on the beach
to make a seaside altar for Apollo
God of the Beachfront, God of Embarkation.
550Dried olive boughs were quickly laid upon it.
Meanwhile, Jason's herdsman had selected
two bulls out of the herd and led them back.
Some younger heroes tugged them toward the altar,
others lugged in grain and lustral water,
555 (409)and Jason duly summoned with a hymn
Phoebus Apollo, his ancestral god:

"Hear me, O lord, O power who inhabit
Pagasae and Aesonia, the city
that bears my father's name. When I came seeking
560a prophecy at Pytho, you assured me
you would reveal the methods of success
and all the courses of my quest, since you
were equal partner in this enterprise.
Therefore, I ask you please to guide our vessel
565there and back again to Greece; please keep
my crew alive and healthy. Afterward,
to do you honor, I shall once again
heap up this altar with the sacrifice
of just so many bulls as men of mine
570 (418)have safely made the journey. Furthermore,
I shall deliver countless other gifts
to Pytho and Ortygia.

Far shooter,
come to us now; accept these sacrifices,
the first of many, that we offer asking
575for an auspicious boarding of our ship.
Lord, when I loose the hawsers, may I find
a future free of harm, and all because
of your assistance. May the gale be gentle,
the weather always favorable for sailing
580as we pursue our quest across the sea."

So he intoned and tossed the barley offering.
Heracles, then, and proud Ancaeus stepped up
to slay the bulls. Heracles with his club
struck one of them dead center on the brow.

585 (429) It lay there in a heap, all crumpled up.
Ancaeus with a bronze ax hacked the other,
chopped clean on through the strained and stubborn sinew
that stuck out of its neck. It toppled forward
onto its horns. The other heroes all
590 jumped in and slit the throats, stripped off the hides,
and made the cuts. While divvying the portions,
they set aside the sacred thighbones, wrapped them
snugly in fat, and roasted them on spits,
and Jason poured a gift of unmixed wine
595 into the fire. Idmon was delighted
to see the blaze enkindling the bones
and favorable coils of thick black smoke
ascending. He divulged Apollo's will
straight off with perfect clarity:

“The gods

600 (440) by harbinger and oracle have promised
you shall return here with the fleece in hand
despite the countless labors that await you
on both the outward and the homeward journey.
The gods have also specified that I
605 must perish somewhere on the Asian mainland
far from home. Although I learned my fate
some time ago from inauspicious bird signs,
I left my homeland, all the same, to join
the quest and win a name that would survive me
among my people.”

610 So the seer spoke
and, when the heroes heard the prophecy,
they reveled in the news of their return
even as they succumbed to grief at learning
of Idmon's doom.

Already at the hour

615 (450) when sunlight starts to slant toward evening
and mountain ridges fill the fields with shadows,
the men had heaped up leaf beds on the beach
and lay there side by side above the surf.
Abundant food was waiting near at hand,
620 and, as the stewards poured them unmixed wine
from jugs, they told each other different stories,
the sort that young men tell to give amusement
over a meal or at a drinking party
when insult and offense are far away.

625 Jason, however, like a man in sorrow,
minutely scrutinized within himself
all that might leave him feeling still more helpless.
Idas leered at him awhile, then ribbed him
in an obnoxious voice:

“Jason, what plan
630 (464) is spinning in your mind? Come now and share
what you are thinking. Has dismay, the monster
that panics cowards, shambled up and mauled you?
I’ll swear an oath and wager as a pledge
the spear with which, above all other heroes,
635 I win renown in combat (no, not even
Zeus backs me up as well as my own spear):

no trouble you encounter will be fatal,
no task you try will go unfinished—no,
not even if a god should block the path—
640 so long as you have Idas on your side.
Just such a champion you are bringing with you
in me, your great salvation from Arene.”

So he proclaimed and picked a full bowl up
with both his hands and swilled the sweet neat wine.
645 (474) He came up with his lips and black beard dripping.
While others muttered curses in the background,
Idmon called him out for all to hear:

“Idiot, have you always cherished wicked
presumptions such as these or is it rather
650 the unmixed wine that has incensed your heart
with recklessness and pushed you to offend
the gods? There are a thousand heartening words
a man can say to urge a comrade on,
but you have blurted out offensive ones.

655 They say Aloeus’ gigantic sons
sputtered such stuff against the blessed gods,
and you’re not half their valor. All the same,
the two of them, courageous as they were,
went down beneath the arrows of Apollo.”

660 (485) As soon as Idmon finished speaking, Idas
the son of Aphareus, burst out laughing,
glared slantwise at the seer and answered sharply:

“Come now and forecast with your prophet’s art
whether the gods shall work the same destruction
665upon me as your father Phoebus wrought
upon the offspring of Aloeus—stop
and think, though, how you will escape my clutches
when you are caught predicting utter nonsense.”

So Idas raged and threatened, and the quarrel
670 would certainly have come to blows, had Jason
and all the others not rebuked and checked them.
Orpheus also did his best to calm them.
He took his lyre up in his left hand
and played a song he had been working on.

675 (496)He sang of how the earth and sea and sky
were once commingled in a single mass
until contentious strife divided each from other
in ordered layers,

how the stars and moon
and sun's advance consistently provide
clear beacons in the firmament,

680and how
the mountains rose, and roaring watercourses,
each with a nymph, started into existence,
and animals began to walk on land.

He sang of how, back in the world's beginning,
685 Ophion and Eurynoma, the daughter
of Ocean, ruled on snow-capped Mount Olympus
till Ophion released the throne perforce
to strong-armed Cronus, and Eurynoma
gave way to Rhea, and the vanquished gods
690 (507) went tumbling into the ocean waves,
and the usurpers ruled the Titans, happy
so long as Zeus was still a child, still growing
in thought, still hidden in a cave on Dictæ.
The earthborn Cyclopes had not yet fashioned
695 the lightning bolt, the source of Zeus' power.

So Orpheus intoned, then hushed his lyre
at the same time as his ambrosial voice.
Though he had ceased, each of his comrades still
leaned forward longingly, their ears intent,
700their bodies motionless with ecstasy.

Such was the magic of the song he cast
upon them. After they had mixed libations
for Zeus, they rose and dutifully poured them
over the victims' simmering tongues, then turned
their minds toward sleeping through the night.

705 (519) As soon

as radiant Dawn with her resplendent gaze
looked on the steep cliff face of Pelion,
and day broke fair, and breezes stirred the sea
that dashed, in turn, upon the headlands, Tiphys
710awoke and roused the dozing crew and bade them
hasten aboard and man the oars. The harbor
of Pagasae called out, urging departure,
and, yes, the ship itself, Pelian *Argo*,
called to them also, since its hull contained
715a talking plank. Athena had herself
cut it from a Dodonan oak to serve
beneath them as the keel. And so the heroes
headed to the benches single file
and duly took their seats beside their weapons
720 (531) in just the places they had been assigned.
Ancaeus and colossal Heracles
were seated at the center bench. The latter
set down his club beside him, and the keel
sank deep beneath his feet. The mooring ropes
725were drawn in, and the heroes poured libations
of wine into the bay, and Jason, weeping,
turned his eyes from his ancestral home.

When dancing for Apollo at Ortygia
or Pytho or along the Ismenus,
730young men will sway around a shrine together
heeding the lyre's rhythm as their nimble
feet beat time—in just that way the heroes
slapped the choppy water with their oars,
churning the sea as Orpheus' harp
735 (541) accompanied their strokes. The billows surged
around the oar blades, and to port and starboard
the dark brine boiled in foam, its spray excited,
stirred up by the thrusts of mighty men.
Their armor shone like fire in the sunlight,
740and *Argo* plunged onward, its long white wake
most like a pathway through a grassy plain.

And on that day the gods looked down from heaven
upon the ship and demigods within it—
the finest heroes ever to have sailed.

745 Nymphs of the mountains on the topmost peak
of Pelion stood wonderstruck, admiring
the craft work of Itonian Athena
and all those heroes with their hands working
the *Argo's* oars. Cheiron, Philyra's son,
750 (554) strode from a mountain summit to the sea
and wet his fetlocks where the brackish surf
churns on the shore. Waving a mighty hand,
he wished them all a safe return. Beside him
his wife was holding up infant Achilles
755 so that Peleus, the loving father,
could see his son.

Under the tutelage
of prudent Tiphys, Hagnias' son
(the master hand who gripped the sanded tiller
and kept the vessel steady on her course),
760 the heroes left the curved shore of the bay
behind them. When they reached the open sea
they stepped the giant mast up in the mast bed
and pulled the forestays taut on either side
to hold it upright. Then they bent the sail on
765 (566) and draped it from the masthead. When a shrill
wind found and filled it, they were quick to fix
the sheets to polished bollards on the deck.
Finally idle and at ease, they skirted
the long headland of Tisae.

Orpheus meanwhile
770 plucked his lyre and sang a lovely hymn
to honor Artemis, the Sailors' Savior,
the Potent Father's Daughter, since she guarded
the cliffs beside them and the coast of Iolcus.
Fish both big and small came leaping out of
775 the sea to revel in the vessel's wake.
In just the way innumerable sheep,
after a satisfying meal at pasture,
tread the footsteps of their rustic guide
back to the paddock, and he leads by playing
780 (577) shepherd music on a bright-pitched pipe,
the shoal of fish accompanied the ship.

And still a stiff wind bore the heroes onward.

Pelasgia and its abounding wheat fields
vanished in mist and, as they coasted farther,
785they passed the rugged cliffs of Pelion,
and soon the spit of Sepae sank from view.
Sciathus rose out of the sea and then
more distant Peiresiae and, beyond it,
mainland again, the coastline of Magnesia,
790and Dolops' barrow under sunny skies.

That afternoon a stiff wind rose against them,
and they were forced to run the ship ashore.
Then, as they roasted joints of sheep at twilight
to honor Dolops, surges riled the sea.
795 (588)Two days and nights they idled on the beach
and on the third again launched *Argo*, spreading
her ample sail. That shore is known today
as *Argous Aphetai* (or "*Argo's Launch*").

From there they sped along past Meliboea,
800marveling at the cliffs and storm-swept shore.
They spotted Homola at dawn, a city
slanted toward the sea, and sailed on past it.
A little farther, and they would have skirted
the mouth of the Amyrus. Next they spotted
805Eurymenae and the eroded gorges
of Ossa and Olympus. As they sped
that night before the panting of the wind,
they passed the Pallenean cliffs beyond
the headland of Canastra, and at dawn
they still were dashing onward.

810 (601)There was Athos,
the Thracian mountain, rising up before them.
The shadow from its utmost summit reaches
eastward to Myrina Promontory
on Lemnos—leagues a well-trimmed ship would need
815from dawn to noon to travel. All day long
a mighty wind was blowing, and the sail
rippling, but the gale expired at sunset.
So the heroes rowed to rugged Lemnos,
land of the venerable Sintians.

820Here, in the previous year, the womenfolk
had mercilessly slaughtered all the menfolk—
inhuman massacre! The men, you see,

had come to loathe and shun their lawful wives
and suffer a persistent lust instead
825 (611)for captive maidens they themselves had carried
home across the sea from raids in Thrace.
(This was the wrath of Cyprian Aphrodite
exactng vengeance on the men because,
for years, they had begrudged her any honors.)
830Stricken with an insatiable resentment
that would destroy their way of life, the women
cut down not only their own wedded husbands
and all the battle brides who slept with them
but every other male as well, the whole
835race of them, so that no one would survive
to make them pay for their atrocious slaughter.

Hypsipyle alone of all the women
thought to save her father—aged Thoas
who, as it chanced, was ruler at the time.
840 (622)She hid him in an empty chest and cast him
into the ocean, hoping he would live.
Fisherman caught him off an island called
Oenoa then but later on Sicinus
after the child Sicinus whom Oenoa
845(a water nymph) conceived from her affair
with Thoas.

Soon enough the women found
animal husbandry, the drills of war,
and labor in the wheat-producing fields
easier than the handcrafts of Athena
850to which they were accustomed. Often, though,
they scanned the level sea in grievous fear
that Thracian soldiers would descend upon them.
So, when they saw the *Argo* under oar
and heading toward their shore, they dressed in armor
855 (637)and like a mob of Maenad cannibals
dashed through Myrina Gate onto the beach.
They all assumed the Thracians were at hand.
Hypsipyle, the child of Thoas, joined them,
and she had donned the armor of her father.
860There they mustered, mute in their dismay,
so great a menace had been swept against them.

Meanwhile the heroes had dispatched ashore
Aethalides, the posthaste messenger,

whose work included overtures and parleys.
865He held the scepter of his father Hermes,
and Hermes had bestowed on him undying
memory of whatever he was told.

Although Aethalides has long since sunk
under the silent tide of Acheron,
870 (645)forgetfulness has never seized his spirit—
no, he is doomed to change homes endlessly,
now numbered with the ghosts beneath the earth,
now with the men who live and see the sun . . .
wait, why have I digressed so widely, talking
about Aethalides?

875On this occasion
his overtures convinced Hypsipyle
to grant his comrades harbor for the night,
since it was getting on toward dusk. At dawn, though,
the heroes still had not unbound the hawsers
because a stiff north wind was blowing.

880Meanwhile,
the Lemnian women all throughout the city
had left their homes and gathered for assembly.
Hypsipyle herself had summoned them.
When they had found their places, she proposed:

885 (657)“Dear women, come now, let us give these men
sufficient gifts, the sorts of things that sailors
stow in the hold—provisions, honeyed wine—
so that they will remain outside our ramparts.
Otherwise, when they come to beg supplies,
890they will discover what we’ve done, and thus
a bad report of us will travel far and wide.
Yes, we have done a horrid, horrid thing,
and knowing it would hardly warm their hearts.

This is the plan before us. If some woman
895among you can propose a better one,
come, let her stand up and reveal it now—
that is the reason I convened this council.”

So Hypsipyle proclaimed, then settled
again upon her father’s marble throne,
900 (669)and her beloved nurse Polyxo stood up,
using a cane to prop her palsied legs

and shriveled feet, since she was keen to speak.
Around her sat four women who, although
they still were maidens and had never married,
905 were garlanded with heads of pure-white hair.
Steady at last and facing the assembly,
Polyxo strained to lift her neck just slightly
above her stooping shoulders and proposed:

“Let us by all means send the strangers presents,
910 just as Hypsipyle has recommended.
It’s best that way. But as for all of you,
what plan do *you* have to defend yourselves
if, say, a Thracian army or some other
enemy force invades? Out in the world
915 (680) such raids are common. Witness, for example,
this group that has arrived out of the blue.

Furthermore, even if some blessed god
should drive them off, a thousand other troubles
worse than war await you in the future.
920 When all us older women pass away
and you, the younger ones, attain a childless
and cruel dotage, how will you get by?
Poor women. Will the oxen yoke themselves
as favors to you in the loamy fields?
925 Will they pull the furrow-cleaving harrow
over the acres of their own volition?
And who will reap the grain when summer ends?

My case is different. Though the gods of death
thus far have shuddered at the sight of me,
930 (691) I’m certain that before the next year’s out,
long, long before such troubles come about,
I will have drawn a gown of earth around me
and earned my share of reliquary honors.
Still, I entreat you girls to think ahead.
935 Right now a perfect means of upkeep lies
before your feet. All you must do is hand
your houses, property, and dazzling city
over to the strangers to maintain.”

So she proposed. A murmur filled the assembly:
940 her speech made sense. As soon as she was finished,
Hypsipyle stood up again and answered:

“If all of you approve of this proposal,
I shall be so immodest as to send
an envoy to their ship at once.”

So spoke she

945 (702)and told Iphinoia, who was at hand:

“Please go and ask the man that leads their party
(whichever he might be) to come and visit
my royal palace so that I may make him
a proposition that will warm his heart.

950Also, be sure to ask his comrades please
to come inside our land and city walls
without concern, provided they are friendly.”

Once she had sent the message, she dissolved
the council and departed toward the palace.

955Iphinoia sought out the Minyans,
and, when they asked why she had come, she greeted
her questioners at once with this announcement:

“Queen Hypsipyle the heir of Thoas
has sent me here to summon your commander
960 (713)(whichever he might be), so she can make him
a proposition that will warm his heart.
Also, she wishes to invite you others
to come inside our land and city walls
without concern, provided you are friendly.”

965So she announced, and all the men approved
of the auspicious overture. You see,
they all assumed Hypsipyle was queen
because she was the only child of Thoas
and he had passed on. So they sent her Jason
970and started getting ready for their visit.

Over either shoulder Jason pinned
a double-woven, vivid-purple mantle,
the handwork of Itonian Athena.
Pallas had given it to him when first
975 (723)she propped up trusses for the ship and taught
the men to measure out the beams by rule.
You could more comfortably stare upon
a sunrise than this mantle’s rich resplendence.

The center was a fiery red, a violet
980border ran around it, and embroidered
illustrations, subtly stitched vignettes,
stood side by side along its top and bottom:

The Cyclopes were seated in it, plying
their endless trade. The stunning thunderbolt
985that they were forging for Imperial Zeus
was all but finished, all but one last tip.
Their iron mallets pounded at it, giving
shape to a blast of molten, raging fire.

Antiope's twin sons were featured, too,
990 (736)Zethus and Amphion, and Thebes was there,
unfortified as yet, but they were raising
the circuit walls. While Zethus seemed to stagger
under the mountain peak upon his back,
Amphion simply strolled along behind him
995and strummed his golden lyre, and a boulder
twice as gigantic followed in his footsteps.

Next appeared thickly braided Cytherea,
the shield of Ares in her hand. Her gown
had come unfastened, tumbled from her shoulder
1000down to her forearm, and exposed a breast,
and in the shield's polished bronze a mirror
image admired her, a true reflection.

Next, there were cattle on a tufted grange,
and Taphian marauders, Teleboans,
1005 (748)fighting the offspring of Electryon
to win the herd. The latter strove to fend off
the former, who were bent on taking plunder.
Dew dampened the enclosure, dew and blood,
and there were many brigands, few herdsmen.

1010A race came next, a pair of chariots,
and Pelops flicked the reins and held the lead,
Hippodameia standing at his side.
Myrtilus whipped his horses in pursuit.
Beside him Oenomaus rode in state,
1015his long spear pointed forward. But the axle
snapped in his hub just as he lunged to pierce
Pelops' back, and he went tumbling sideways.

Apollo was embroidered in it, too,
a strong youth, not yet fully grown, and launching
1020 (761) a shaft at giant Tityus, who was rashly
tearing the veil from Apollo's mother—
Tityus whom divine Elara carried
but Earth brought forth and suckled like a midwife.

Phrixus the Minyan was there as well,
1025 depicted as if he were giving ear
to what the ram was saying. Yes, the ram
seemed to be speaking. If you watched the scene
you would be mute with wonder, duped by art,
intent on overhearing something wise.
1030 And you would gaze a long time waiting for it.

Such was the gift of the Itonian goddess
Athena. In his right hand Jason gripped
the long-range throwing spear that Atalanta
once gave him as a gift on Maenalus.
1035 (771) She had been pleased to meet him and was eager
to undertake the quest, but he decided
against her in the end, because he feared
the ugly rivalries that lust provokes.

He strode on toward the city like the star
1040 young brides who are confined to new-built chambers
watch rising radiantly above their houses.
They stand adazzle as its twinkling crimson
shines through the dark-blue night and charms their eyes.
As it ascends, the virgin, too, delights
1045 in longing for a youth, the groom for whom
her parents have preserved her as a bride.
But he is off somewhere, some distant city,
dealing with strangers. Brilliant like that star,
Jason came marching in the envoy's tracks.

1050 (782) When they had passed the gates into the city,
the females all came swarming up behind him,
admiring a strange new male. He fixed
his gaze steadfastly on the ground until
he reached Hypsipyle's sunlit abode.

1055 At his approach, the serving women parted
a pair of finely chiseled double doors.

Iphinoia then led him through a courtyard
and seated him upon a shining couch
facing her mistress, who, with eyes downcast,
1060 released a blush across her maiden cheeks.
For all her modesty, she told him lies:

“Why, stranger, have you sat so long outside
our circuit walls? As you can see, no males
inhabit here. They up and emigrated
1065 (796) and now are furrowing the harvest-bearing
fields of the Thracian mainland. I shall tell you
truthfully all about our whole misfortune
so that you know the facts as well as I.

Back when my father Thoas ruled this city
1070 our men would sail abroad and from their ships
pillage the dwellings of the Thracian tribes
who hold the mainland opposite the island.
And when they sailed back home to us, they brought
countless spoils, including captive girls.

1075 This was a plot, though, working toward fulfillment,
a vicious plot of Cypris. Yes, she struck them
with heart-corrupting madness. Husbands started
spurning their wedded wives and went so far,
once they had given way to the affliction,
1080 (806) to drive us from our homes and sleep instead
with women captured by their spears. The fiends!
We let it go for quite some time indeed,
thinking they would come to change their minds,
but their diseased condition only worsened
1085 and soon was twice as shameless as before.

Legitimate descendants were compelled
to yield pride of place in their own homes.
A bastard populace was rising up.
Maidens and widowed housewives were abandoned
1090 to walk the streets just as they were, disowned.
A father never showed the least concern
for his own daughter, even if he saw her
brutalized by a merciless stepmother
before his very eyes, and sons no longer
1095 (816) avenged disgraceful slander of their mothers,
and brothers cut the sisters from their hearts.

At home, at dances, feasts, and the assembly
the captive girls held sway, and so it went—
until a god inspired us to vengeance
1100and we barred the gates against our husbands
when they returned from pillaging the Thracians.
We told them they must change their ways or pack up
their concubines and settle somewhere else.

After demanding all the children—all
1105the boys, that is—within our walls, they left
and settled on the snowy plains of Thrace,
where they are living still. And that is why
you and your men should settle down with us.

If you are willing and would find it pleasant
1110 (829)to stay with us, you could assume the kingship
and honors of my father Thoas. You
will not be disappointed in our soil,
I think. Ours is the richest, the most fruitful
of all the islands riding the Aegean.
1115Go now and tell your friends what I propose—
and please do not remain outside the city.”

So she proposed, with half-truths glossing over
the massacre that had been perpetrated
against the Lemnian males. Jason replied:

1120“Hypsipyle, we gratefully accept
the heartfelt aid that you are offering
to ease our desperate need. After reporting
the details to my men, I will return here.
But let the royal scepter and the island
1125 (840)remain in your possession. I am not
refusing them from scorn, no, but because
pressing adventures speed me on my way.”

With this he clasped her right hand and at once
went back the way he came. Around him maidens
1130from all directions gathered in excitement,
a swarm of them, until he passed the gate.
Later, once Jason had reported all
Hypsipyle had told him at the palace,
another company of girls arrived
1135in smooth-wheeled wagons, bearing countless tokens

of friendship to the heroes on the shore.
Eagerly, then, the females led the males
into their homes for entertainment. Cypris,
you see, had roused them all with sweet desire—
1140 (851) she did this as a favor for Hephaestus,
so that the isle of Lemnos might again
fill up with men and rest secure thereafter.

The son of Aeson sought Hypsipyle's
royal estate, and his companions each
1145 landed wherever chance received them—all
but Heracles. He of his own free will
remained beside the *Argo* with a few
select companions. Soon the city turned
to dancing, banqueting, and pleasure. Incense
1150 of offerings suffused the atmosphere,
and all their songs and prayers celebrated,
before the other gods, famous Hephaestus
Hera's son and Cypris Queen of Love.

And so from day to day the journey languished.
1155 (863) The heroes would have idled there still longer
had Heracles not called them all together,
without the women, and reproached them thus:

"Fools, what prevents us from returning home—
what, have we shed our kinsmen's blood? Have we
1160 set sail to seek fiancées in contempt
of ladies on the mainland? Are we planning
to divvy up the fertile fields of Lemnos
and settle here for good? We won't accrue
glory while cooped up here with foreign girls
1165 for years on end. No deity is going
to nab the fleece in answer to our prayers
and send it flying back to us. Come, then,
let's each go off and tend his own affairs.
And as for *that* one—leave him to enjoy
1170 (873) Hypsipyle's bedchamber day and night
until he peoples Lemnos with his sons,
and deathless glory catches up with him."

So he condemned his comrades. None of them
dared meet his gaze or make excuses, no,
1175 they hurried as they were from the assembly

to get the *Argo* ready for departure.

The women ran to find them when they heard.
As bees swarm from a rocky hive and buzz
about the handsome lilies, and the dewy
1180 meadow itself rejoices as they flit
from bloom to bloom collecting sweet fruition,
so did the women press around the men
and weep as they embraced them one last time,
entreating all the blessed gods to grant them
1185 (886) safe passage home. So, too, Hypsipyle
took Jason's hands in hers and prayed, and tears
were tumbling for her lover's loss:

"Go now,

and may the gods protect you and your comrades
from harm, so that you live to give your king
1190 the golden fleece. That is your heart's desire.
This island and my father's royal scepter
will still be yours if, after you are home,
you ever wish to come back here again.
How easily you could amass a vast
1195 following out of the surrounding cities!
But you will not desire this future, no,
my heart foresees that it will not be so.
Promise that, both abroad and safe at home,
you will remember me from time to time—
1200 (898) Hypsipyle. But, please, what should I do
if the immortals grace me with a child?
I shall obey your will with all my heart."

Stirred to esteem, the son of Aeson answered:

"Hypsipyle, I pray the blessed gods
1205 accomplish everything as you desire it.
Still, you must check your wild expectations
where I'm concerned, since it will be enough
for me to live again in my own land
at Pelias' mercy. All I ask
1210 is that the gods preserve me on my quest.

But if my fate forbid that I return,
after a lengthy journey, home to Greece,
and you have borne a son, hold on to him
until he comes of age and send him then

1215 (906) to Iolcus in Pelasgia to ease
my parents' grief (if they are still alive),
so that they may be safe in their own home,
comfortable and far from Pelias."

He spoke these final words and was the first
1220 to board the ship. The other heroes followed,
took up their oars, and manned the benches. Argus
loosed the hawser from a sea-washed rock,
and soon the heroes were exuberantly
slapping the water with their lengthy oars.

1225 At Orpheus' bidding they debarked
that evening on the island of Electra,
Atlas' daughter, so that they might suffer
gentle induction, learn her secret rites,
and cruise more safely through the chilling sea.
1230 (919) But I shall speak no further of such matters.
Farewell, Electra, and farewell, you powers
whose task it is to guard and keep the secrets
of which it is forbidden me to sing.

Off Samothrace they briskly pulled their oars
1235 over the Black Gulf's depths. The land of Thrace
was larboard, and the isle of Imbros starboard
there on the seaward side, and just at sunset
they reached a finger of the Chersonese.
A stiff south wind was blowing for them there,
1240 so they unfurled the canvas to the gale's
beneficence and soon approached the roiling
narrows of Helle daughter of Athamas.
By morning they had left the sea astern.
(They had, in fact, been sailing all night long
1245 (929) within a farther sea between the headlands
of Rhoeteum.) The land of Ida starboard,
Dardania abaft, they passed Abydos,
Percota, sandy beaches in Abarnis,
and holy Pityeia. Thus they crossed
1250 by oar and sail before the next sunrise
the whole length of the Hellespont and all
its dark whirlpools.

There is a lofty island
that slopes on all sides down to the Propontis.
A steep and sea-washed spit of land connects it

1255to mainland Phrygia and a wealth of grain.
Two of its shores are welcoming to ships,
both of them north of the Asepus River.
The island had the name of Black Bear Mountain,
and there were savage Earthborn Giants on it,
1260 (943)great wonders for the locals to behold:
six rippling arms grew out of each of them—
two sprouting out of their colossal shoulders,
four farther down along their frightening flanks.
The Doliones dwelled there, all the same,
1265along the spit and island's rim. Their king was
Cyzicus son of Aeneus. Aeneta,
daughter of divine Eusorus, bore him.
Though wild and violent, the Earthborn Giants
never attacked the Dolionan people
1270because they were descended from Poseidon—
he guarded them.

A Thracian gale impelled
the *Argo* toward this island, and the heroes
moored in a harbor called the "Handsome Port."
Here it was that, at Tiphys' suggestion,
1275 (957)they cut the stone that served as anchor loose,
dropped it into the stream Artacia,
and chose a larger one to suit their needs.
Years later, to fulfill Apollo's plan,
the sons of Neleus (that is, the ones
1280that settled Asia Minor) set apart
the very stone abandoned by the heroes
as sacred in the temple of Athena,
Helper of Jason, and the gift, of course,
was quite appropriate.

The Doliones
1285and Cyzicus their king received the heroes
and, after finding out their names and mission,
warmly invited them to stay as guests.
Cyzicus urged them please to row in farther
and make their mooring in the city harbor,
1290 (965)and so they did and, after raising there
an altar to Apollo God of Landings,
busied themselves preparing sacrifices.

The king himself supplied what they required—
some sweet wine and a flock of sheep. You see,
1295Cyzicus had received a prophecy

that claimed a godlike crew would land one day,
and he should rush warmly to welcome them
and take no thought of war. His beard was downy,
like Jason's, and had only lately sprouted,
1300and fate had not yet graced him with a child.
Cleite, his plush-tressed, newly wedded wife,
daughter of Merops of Percota, shared
a chamber with him in the royal palace,
but labor pains were still unknown to her.
1305 (978)Cyzicus only recently had led her
out of her home on the opposing coast,
and he had paid her father many gifts
to buy the right to wed her. Nonetheless,
he brought himself to leave the marriage chamber
1310and bridal bed and entertain the heroes.
He had dismissed suspicion from his heart.

They asked each other questions at the feast—
Cyzicus learned of Pelias' bidding
and the objective of their quest. The heroes,
1315in turn, inquired about the neighboring cities
and the whole basin of the vast Propontis,
but Cyzicus' knowledge ranged no further,
much as they wished to learn what lay beyond.

So half the heroes set about ascending
1320 (985)Dindymum at dawn to see firsthand
what waters they would cross, and to this day
the path they took is known as Jason's Way.
The other half, however, stayed behind
and rowed the *Argo* from her former mooring
over to Chytus Haven.

1325All at once
the Earthborn ones came down around the mountain
and tried to block the exit from the harbor
by dropping countless rocks into the water,
the way men catch sea creatures in a pool.
1330Heracles and the younger men, however,
had stayed back with the ship, and Heracles
nocked arrows nimbly on his back-bent bow
and dropped the giants freely one by one
since they had focused all their strength on heaving
1335 (995)and hurling jagged rocks into the sea.
No doubt the goddess Hera, Zeus' consort,

had reared these horrid things as yet another
labor for Heracles. The other heroes
turned back before they reached the mountaintop
1340and joined their comrades, and they all got down
to slaughtering the Earthborn Giants, routing
by shaft and spear their reckless, headlong charges
till each and every one of them was dead.

As woodcutters, once they have finished felling
1345colossal old-growth trees, proceed to lay them
side by side along the surf to soak
and soften and receive the dowels, the heroes
laid out the Earthborn Giants one by one
along the shorefront of the choppy harbor—
1350 (1008)some headfirst in the brine, their tops and torsos
submerged, their legs protruding landward; others,
conversely, had their feet out in the deep
and heads out on the beach. Both groups were doomed
to serve as meals for fish and birds alike.

1355After the men returned, unscathed, from battle,
they loosed the hawsers, and the wind came up,
and they pursued their quest across the swell.
All day the *Argo* coasted under sail.
At evening, though, the wind became unsteady.
1360Gusts from the opposite direction seized her
and blew her back until she reached once more
the island of the kindly Doliones.
They disembarked at midnight, and the rock
to which they hastily attached a line
1365 (1019)is called the Sacred Outcrop to this day.

But none among them was astute enough
to notice they had stopped at the same island.
Since it was night the Doliones failed
as well to mark their friends come back again,
1370no, they assumed Pelasgian invaders,
Macrian men, had breached their beach instead,
and so they took up arms and started fighting.

Their shields and ash-wood lances clashed as swiftly
as fire that has sparked on arid brushwood
1375leaps aloft in crested conflagration.
Battle, horrible and unforgiving,

befell the Doliones. Cyzicus
was not permitted to escape his doom
or go home to enjoy his bridal bed.
1380 (1032) Just as he joined the battle, Jason ran up
and stabbed him in the center of the chest.
Ribs shattered round the spear tip, and he crumpled
upon the beach and met his destined end.

Mortals can never sidestep fate; the cosmic
1385 net is extended round us everywhere.
And so it was that, on the very night
Cyzicus had assumed that he was safe
from bitter slaughter at the heroes' hands,
destiny snared him, and he joined the fray.

1390 Many others on his side were slain:
Heracles clubbed the life from Megabrontes
and Telecles; Acastus slaughtered Sphodris;
Peleus vanquished battle-keen Gephyrus
and Zelys; and that mighty ash-wood spearman
1395 (1043) Telamon triumphed over Basileus.
Idas in turn disposed of Promeus; Clytius,
Hyacinthus; and the brothers Castor
and Polydeuces slew Megalossaces
and Phlogius. Beside them Meleager
1400 son of Oeneus dispatched Artaces
leader of men and bold Itymoneus.
Still today the locals venerate
the men who perished in that fight as heroes.

The remnants of the Doliones turned
1405 and fled like doves pursued by swift-winged hawks.
After they stumbled, hoarse and helter-skelter,
into the city, cries of lamentation
erupted—yes, its soldiers had retreated,
retreated from a dismal fight.

At daybreak

1410 (1053) both parties recognized the fatal error,
but nothing could be done to make it right.
Violent sorrow gripped the Minyans
once they had spotted Aeneus' son
Cyzicus lying, bloody, in the dust.

1415 Three days the heroes and the Doliones

tore out their hair and mourned the loss together.
Then, after putting on their bronze war gear,
they marched three times around the corpse, entombed it,
and filed away to the Leimonian plain
1420to hold memorial games, as is the custom.

Cleite, however, Cyzicus' wife,
refused to stay behind among the living
now that her man was dead. She heaped a further
sorrow on top of what had gone before
1425 (1065)by fastening a noose around her neck.
Even the woodland nymphs bewailed her passing.
In fact, these deities collected all
the tears that tumbled earthward from their eyelids
into a spring called Cleite—the “Renowned”
name of the ill-starred widow.

1430Zeus had never
dropped a more heart-devastating day
upon the Dolionan men and women.
None of them could enjoy the taste of food
and, far into the future, sorrow kept them
1435from working at the mill, and they subsided
on raw provisions. Still today, in fact,
when the Cyzician Ionians
make yearly sacrifices to the dead,
they always use the public stone, and not
1440 (1072)the stones they keep at home, to grind the meal.

And then stiff winds arose and blew, preventing
the heroes from departing, twelve nights, twelve days,
but on the thirteenth night, when all their comrades
had yielded to exhaustion and were sleeping
1445heavily through the final watch, two men—
Amphycus' son Mopsus and Acastus—
were standing sentry, and a halcyon
appeared and fluttered round the golden hair
of Jason son of Aeson, prophesying
1450with strident voice the calming of the gales.
As soon as Mopsus heard and apprehended
the seabird's joyous news, some higher power
dispatched it fluttering aloft again
to perch atop the *Argo's* sculpted stern post.
1455 (1090)Mopsus immediately ran to shake
Jason sleeping under soft sheep fleeces.

Soon as his captain was awake, he said:

“You, son of Aeson, must ascend to where
a temple stands on rugged Dindymum
1460and soothe the Mother of the Blessed Gods
upon her shining throne. Once you have done this,
the stormy gales shall cease. Such is the message
I heard just now. You see, an ocean-dwelling
halcyon fluttered round your sleeping head,
1465revealing everything that must be done.

The winds, the ocean, and the earth’s foundations
all depend upon the Mother Goddess,
as does the snow-capped bastion of Olympus.
When she forsakes the mountains and ascends
1470 (1101)the mighty vault of heaven, Zeus himself,
the son of Cronus, offers her his place,
and all the blessed gods bow before her power.”

Such were his words, and Jason welcomed them,
vaulted for joy out of his bed, and ran
1475to rouse his comrades. Once they were awake,
he told them what the offspring of Ampycus,
Mopsus, had ascertained.

The younger heroes

hurried to drag some oxen from the stalls
and drive them all the way up Dindymum’s
1480precipitous ascent. After detaching
the hawsers from the Sacred Rock, the others
rowed into the so-called “Thracian Harbor,”
picked out some few to stay and guard the ship,
and went to scale the mountain.

From the peak

1485 (1112)the Macrian massifs and all the Thracian
coastline stretching opposite them seemed
almost within arm’s reach. They also spotted
the misty entrance to the Bosphorus,
the Mysian hills, and there, across the strait,
1490Asepus River and its namesake city
and the Nepeian plain of Adrasteia.

There in the forest was an old vine stump,
stubborn and dry. They cut it out to make
a sacred image of the Mountain Goddess.

1495 Artful Argus carved it, and they set it
atop a rugged outcrop in the shade
of lofty oaks, which shoot their taproots deeper
than any other tree.

They built an altar
of fieldstone, garlanded their brows with oak leaves,
1500 (1125) and offered sacrifice, invoking Mother
Dindymena, Dweller in Phrygia,
and Queen of Many Names. They also summoned
Titias and Cyllenus who, alone
of all the Dactyls bred on Cretan Ida,
1505 have earned the titles “Destiny Assessors”
and “Confidants” of the Idaean Mother.
A nymph named Anchiala brought them forth
in the Dictaeon Cave while squeezing fistfuls
of Oaxian earth to ease the pain.

1510 The son of Aeson poured libations over
the blazing victims and implored the goddess
with various prayers to turn the storms away.
Under the tutelage of Orpheus
the younger men performed the Dance in Armor,
1515 (1135) leaping and pounding swords on shields so that
any unlucky cry of grief the locals
might possibly be making for their king
would vanish in the din. From that day on
the Phrygians have always celebrated
1520 Rhea with tambourine and kettledrum.

These flawless sacrifices clearly won
the goddess’ approval. Signs appeared,
conclusive proof: fruit tumbled from the trees
in great abundance, and beneath their feet
1525 the earth spontaneously sprouted flowers
out of the tender grass, and savage creatures
forsook their dens and thickets in the wild
to fawn and beg with wagging tails around them.

Later, another marvel came to pass:
1530 (1147) water had never flowed on Dindymum
but on that day it sprang forth on its own
ceaselessly from the barren mountaintop,
and locals from that day have called the spring
“The Font of Jason.” Then they held a feast

1535in honor of the goddess of that mountain,
the Mountain of the Bears, and sang the praises
of Rhea, Rhea, Queen of Many Names.

The storm winds died by daybreak, and they left
the island under oar. And then a spirit
1540of healthy competition spurred the heroes
to find out which of them would weary last.
The air had calmed around them, and the waves
fallen asleep. Trusting in these conditions,
they heaved the *Argo* on with all their might.
1545 (1158)Not even lord Poseidon's tempest-footed
stallions could have outstripped them as they dashed
across the sea.

But when the violent winds
that rise up fresh from rivers in the evening
had riled the swell again, the heroes tired
1550and gave up trying. Heracles alone,
he and his boundless strength, pulled all those weary
oarsmen along. His labor sent a shudder
through the strong-knit timbers of the ship,
and soon the *Argo* raised Rhyndacus strait
1555and the colossal barrow of Aegaeum.

But as they passed quite near the Phrygian coast
in their desire to reach the Mysian land,
Heracles, in the very act of plowing
deep furrows through the sea swell, broke his oar
1560 (1169)and toppled sideways. While the handle stayed
locked in his fist, the ocean caught and carried
the blade off in the *Argo's* wake. He sat up,
dumbstruck, silent, swiveling his eyes:
his hands were not accustomed to disuse.

1565At just the hour when a field hand,
a plowman, gratefully forsakes the furrows
to head home hungry for his evening meal
and squats on weary knees, sun-burned, dust-caked,
before the door, eying his calloused hands
1570and calling curses down upon his belly,
the heroes reached the land of the Cians
who dwell beneath Mount Arganthonia
along the delta of the Cius River.

Since they had come in peace, the local people,
1575 (1179) Mysians by race, received them warmly
and gave provisions, sheep and ample wine,
to satisfy their needs. Some of the heroes
collected kindling; others gathered leaves
out of the fields to make up mattresses;
1580 still others grated fire out of sticks,
decanted wine in bowls, and, after giving
due offerings at dusk to Lord Apollo,
the God of Embarkation, cooked a feast.

After encouraging his friends to banquet
1585 heartily, Heracles the son of Zeus
set out into the woods to find a tree
to carve into an oar that fit his hands.
He wandered for a while until he spotted
a pine with few boughs and a dearth of needles,
1590 (1190) most like a poplar in its height and girth.

He set his bow and arrow-bearing quiver
straightway upon the ground and laid aside
the lion skin. Then, leveling his club,
a great big bronze-encinctured log, he loosened
1595 the trunk inside the soil. With all his faith
placed in his strength, he wrapped his arms around it,
squared his shoulder, braced his feet, pulled tight,
and heaved it, deeply rooted though it was,
out of the earth, with big clods dangling from it.

1600 In just the way that, after dire Orion
has made his stormy setting in the sea,
a sudden bluster from above assails
a ship's mast unexpectedly and snaps it
free of the stays and wedges, Heracles
1605 (1205) ripped out the pine. Afterward he retrieved
his bow and arrows, lion skin, and club
and went galumphing shoreward.

Meanwhile Hylas
had taken up a pitcher cast in bronze
and wandered far from his companions, seeking
1610 a holy flowing river, so that he
might draw off water for the evening meal.
He wanted to get everything in order
promptly, before his lord came back to camp.

Such were the habits Heracles himself
1615 had fostered since he first took Hylas, then
a toddler, from the palace of his father,
the noble Theodamas, whom the hero
ruthlessly slew among the Dryopes
in a dispute about a plowing ox.

1620 (1213) You see, this Theodamas had been poor,
so he was furrowing his fields himself
when Heracles commanded him to yield
the plowing ox or else. The hero did this
only to find a pretext for a war
1625 against the Dryopes because they lived
scornful of justice—but this tale would steer
my song too far from its purported subject.

Soon Hylas happened on a spring called Pegae
among the locals. As it chanced, the nymphs
1630 were just then gathering to dance. In fact,
the nymphs who dwelled upon that lovely summit
convened each night to honor Artemis
in song. All those whose haunts were peaks and torrents—
the guardian forest nymphs—were in the woods
chanting their hymns.

1635 (1228) But one, a water nymph,
had surfaced from the sweetly flowing spring,
and she could see the boy, how flush with beauty
he was, how captivating in his sweetness,
because the moon shone full and clear above them
1640 and cast its beams on him. The goddess Cypris
so roused the nymph that she could hardly keep
her heart together. Rapture struck her helpless.

As soon as he was laid at length and dipping
the pitcher in the spring, just as the surface
1645 water came rushing in and gurgled echoes
inside the bronze, she threw her left arm up
around his neck. An urgent need to kiss
his plush lips moved her, so her right hand tugged
his elbow closer, closer—down he plunged
into the swirling water.

1650 (1240) Polyphemus
son of Eilatus was the only one
of all the crew to hear the boy cry out.
He had been walking down the path to greet

colossal Heracles on his return.

1655He dashed toward Pegae like some savage beast
that baas and bleats have summoned from afar.

On fire with hunger, it pursues the sheep
but never reaches them because the shepherds
already have enclosed them in the fold.

1660Just as that creature snorts and roars horribly
until he tires, so did Polyphemus
groan horribly and range about the place
hallooing, but his shouts were all in vain.

So, whipping out his broadsword with dispatch,
1665 (1250)he hurried farther down the path, afraid
that wild animals were mangling Hylas
or kidnappers had lain in ambush for him
and were that moment dragging him away,
an all-too-easy prey. As, sword in hand,
1670he ran along, he spotted Heracles
and recognized at once what man it was
galumphing through the twilight toward the ship.
Breath laboring, heart pounding, Polyphemus
divulged at once the dire calamity:

1675“Poor friend, I shall be the first to tell you
news of a shocking loss. Though Hylas left
to fetch some water, he has not come safely
back to us. Bandits nabbed him and decamped
or beasts have eaten him. I heard his cry.”

1680 (1261)So he explained, and at his words abundant
sweat tumbled down from Heracles' temples,
and bad blood boiled blackly in his guts.
He hurled the fir tree to the ground in rage
and set out running, and his feet impelled him
at top speed down the path.

1685As when a bull
that has been goaded by a gadfly bolts
out of the meadows and the fens and, heedless
of herd and herdsman, rushes here and there,
and only stops to rear his thick dewlap
1690and roar in vain at the relentless stinging,
so in his frenzy Heracles at one time
worked his frantic knees incessantly
and at another paused the search to heave

a mighty bellow far into the distance.

1695 (1273) Soon the morning star had risen over
the highest summits, and a breeze got up,
and Tiphys promptly roused the crew to clamber
aboard and take advantage of the wind.
Straightaway they embarked and with a will
1700 pulled up the anchor stone and hauled the cables
astern. The mainsail bellied with the gale,
and they were happy to be far from shore
coasting around the Posideian headland.
Only after Bright-Eyed Dawn had risen
1705 from the horizon to the middle sky,
and all the seaways were distinct and vivid,
and the dew-wet plains were spangling bright,
did they discern that they had accidentally
abandoned Heracles and Polyphemos.

1710 (1284) Fierce was the quarrel that erupted then,
an ignominious row, since they had left
the bravest of the company behind.
Jason was so dumbstruck and at a loss
he uttered nothing one way or the other—
1715 no, he just sat there gnawing at his heart,
feeling the burden of catastrophe.
Rage laid its hands on Telamon, who told him:

“Go on, keep sitting there at ease like that
because you are the one who benefits
1720 from leaving Heracles behind. You hatched
this little scheme so that his fame in Greece
would not eclipse your own, that is, if ever
the gods consent to grant us passage home.
But what’s the use in words? No, I will go
1725 (1294) and bring him back, even if I must do it
without your clique of co-conspirators.”

So he accused them all, then charged at Tiphys
the son of Hagnias. His eyes were blazing
like twists of flame inside a raging bonfire.
1730 They would have all sailed back across the gulf
and braved its constant gales and deep-sea swell
to reach again the Mysian dominions,
had not the sons of Thracian Boreas

broken in and with harsh reproaches stopped
1735 Telamon short—a ruinous decision!
Terrible vengeance later came upon them
at Heracles' hands because they chose
to halt the search for him: when they were heading
home from the funeral games of Pelias,
1740 (1305) he killed them on the isle of Tenos, heaped
barrows above them, and erected two
pillars on top (one of the pillars swivels
in answer to the breath of Boreas—
a clever thing, a wonder to behold).

1745 Out of the salt sea's depths appeared, just then,
Glaucus, the eloquent interpreter
for holy Neleus—a shaggy head
emerged, and then a torso to the waist.
His right hand resting on the *Argo's* keel,
1750 he bellowed at the agitated sailors:

“Why, in contempt of mighty Zeus' will,
have you resolved to drag bold Heracles
the whole way to Aeëtes' citadel?
Heracles' lot is bound to Argos: heavy
1755 (1317) toil for presumptuous Eurystheus
until he finishes the full twelve labors—
and he will sit at the immortals' banquet
if only he completes a last few more.
So let his loss occasion no regret.

1760 Likewise with Polyphemos, who is destined
to build beside the Cius River's mouth
a famous citadel among the Mysians
and then go off to meet his destiny
in the unbounded Chalybian waste.

1765 As for the loss of Hylas, here's the cause:
a holy nymph has dragged him off as husband
because she loves him. When those heroes ran
to rescue Hylas, they were left behind.”

After these words he dove and cloaked his body
1770 (1327) in the unresting swell. The dark-blue wake
that boiled out of his plunge rose up behind
the hollow ship and drove it through the waves.

The men took solace in the prophecy,
and Telamon went running up to Jason,
1775gripped his hand, embraced him, and proclaimed:

“Do not be angry with me, son of Aeson,
if, in my thoughtlessness, I gave offense.
Overwhelming sorrow made me utter
a rash, insufferable accusation.

1780Let us cast that error to the winds
and be as friendly as we were before.”

Jason replied with due consideration:

“You certainly accused me, dear old friend,
of dirty dealing when you claimed, in public,
1785 (1338)I had betrayed a man that loved me well.
Still, I shall foster bitter wrath against you
no longer, grossly slandered though I was,
since it was not for wealth or flocks of sheep
that you succumbed to rage, but for a man,
1790your comrade. No, no, I sincerely hope
that you would fight like that on my behalf,
should such a thing befall me in the future.”

After these words they both sat down together,
side by side and friendly as before.

1795As for the two who had been left behind
(as Zeus himself intended), Polyphemos
son of Eilatus was indeed predestined
to found among the Mysians a city
named from the Cius River; Heracles
1800 (1347)was bound as well to heavy labor under
Eurystheus’ thumb. Before he left, though,
he threatened to annihilate the Mysians
right then and there if they did not divulge
the fate of Hylas, whether he was dead
1805or living. They selected and surrendered,
in pawn, the children of their noblemen
and promised they would never give up searching.
Still today the Cician people
ask after Hylas son of Theodamas
1810and recognize a bond with well-built Trachis,
the town where Heracles immured the boys

they gave as pledges to be led away.

All day, all night a stiff wind kept on blowing,
pushing the *Argo* onward, but by dawn
1815 (1359) nothing was stirring, not the slightest breeze.
They spotted on the coast a jutting headland
which, from the gulf, looked wide and welcoming
and, as the sun came up, they rowed ashore.

BOOK 2

Haughty Amycus, the Bebrycian king,
kept farms and cattle paddocks near the shore.
Begotten by Poseidon Patriarch
on a Bithynian nymph named Melia,
she was the most obnoxious man alive.
It was his savage custom to permit
no visitors to exit his dominions
until they met him in a boxing match,
and he had beaten many of his neighbors
to death.

10 On this occasion King Amycus
came strutting straight up to the heroes' ship
and scornfully dispensed with asking them
who they might be and why they made the journey.
No, he just dropped a challenge on them all:

15 (11) "Listen to me, you seaborne derelicts,
and learn what you most certainly should know.
The law here stipulates no foreigner
that comes ashore upon Bebrycian land
may ever leave again until he holds up
20 his fists against my fists and fights with me.
So quick, now, pick the strongest man among you
and let him step right up and face the challenge.
Be warned, though: if you spurn our laws, brute force
will grab you, and the outcome will be dire."

25 So snarled he, certain he was tough, and wild
resentment gripped the heroes at his words.
The challenge wounded Polydeuces most,
and he leapt up to represent his comrades:

"Hold on. Whoever you presume to be,
30 (23) it's hardly necessary to insult us
with crass displays of force. We shall obey
your laws and customs. I myself am eager
to satisfy your challenge on the spot."

Such was his blunt rejoinder, and Amycus

35swiveled his eyes and glared at Polydeuces,
just as a lion wounded by a spear
and hemmed around by men on every side
focuses solely on the one that first
struck him but failed to land a fatal blow.

40Tyndareus' son then laid aside
the lightweight cloak one of the girls of Lemnos
gave him as a parting gift. Amycus
undid, in turn, his doubly thick black mantle
clasp by clasp and threw his notched and knotted
45 (34)olive-wood crook of kingship to the ground.

As soon as they had found a spot nearby
to function as a ring, they sat their rival
companies separately from one another
along the sand. The two contestants differed
50greatly in stature and physique: Amycus
looked like the monstrous spawn of grim Typhoeus
or even one of the abominations
Earth herself had brought up long ago
to challenge Zeus. Tyndareus' son,
55in contrast, shimmered like the star of heaven
that shoots its brightest beams against the darkness
at evening time. Yes, he was Zeus' son—
a soft down sprouting on his cheeks, his eyes
aglint with joy, he gloried like a beast
60 (45)in godlike strength. Whereas he shadowboxed
to prove his fists were sportive as before
and not benumbed by handling an oar,
Amycus scorned such exercise. He simply
stood there in silence, glaring at his foe,
65heart pounding with the urge to shatter ribs
and spatter blood.

Amycus' assistant

Lycoreus set down before their feet
two pairs of tanned and toughened rawhide straps.
Haughtily, then, the king addressed his rival:

70“No need to bother drawing lots. Go on
and pick whichever set of straps you like—
that way you cannot say I tricked you later.
Go on, now, wrap them round your hands and then
learn well and tell all other men how skilled

75 (58)I am at toughening and cutting ox hide
and spattering the cheeks of men with blood.”

So spoke the braggart king. But Polydeuces
did not respond in kind, no, he just smiled
and chose the straps that lay before his feet.
80Castor and Talaus the son of Bias
jogged in and tied the straps on, all the while
pumping him up with fervor for the match.
Aretus and Ornytus did the same
for King Amycus, nor did they suspect,
85poor fools, his highness was a doomed man facing
his final match.

Soon as the straps were wrapped
around their hands, they squared off toe-to-toe,
hefted their huge fists up before their faces,
and charged in, bringing all their weight to bear
90 (70)each on the other. On a choppy sea
a violent wave will rear above a ship,
then, just as it is poised to swamp the deck,
the helmsman’s skill will save her by a hairsbreadth,
and off she glides unscathed. Just so Amycus
95pounded and pounded and allowed no respite,
while Polydeuces with superior skill
baffled the onslaught and remained uninjured.
Once he had learned the strengths and weaknesses
of his opponent’s brutish fighting style,
100he stood his ground and gave him blow for blow.
Imagine shipwrights’ hammers, how they pound
tapering dowels into sturdy planks—
the thumping sounds incessantly—that’s how
the cheeks and chins of both opponents sounded.
105 (83)Teeth shattering with constant horrid cracks,
the men did not stop pummeling each other
until sheer lack of breath had overcome them.

They drew apart a spell and, panting, woozy,
wiped streams of perspiration from their brows.
110Soon, though, they charged again, like bulls in heat
fighting to win a pasture-fattened heifer.
Amycus stretched his torso, stood on tiptoe
like a butcher poised to slay an ox,
then brought the weighty bottom of his fist
115hammering down. But Polydeuces tilted

his head in time and dodged the brunt of it.
The heavy blow went glancing off his shoulder.
Then Polydeuces leaned in closer, locked
his leg behind his foe's, and with a swift heave
120 (95)haymakered him above the ear. The skull
cracked, and Amycus crumpled to his knees
in agony. The Minyan heroes cheered
when life came spurting from the big man's head.

Far from abandoning their king, however,
125his loyal soldiers took up gnarled clubs
and hunting spears and charged at Polydeuces
in one mad rush. The heroes interlocked
their shields before him and unsheathed their swords.

Castor was first to strike. A man ran up,
130and Castor axed him in the head, the head
split down the middle, and the halves flopped over
onto his shoulders. Straight out of his triumph
Polydeuces felled Itymoneus
and Mimas: with a flying leap he struck
135 (106)the one beneath the chest and knocked him flat;
then, when the other made a rush, he struck
his left eye with his right hand, tore away
the eyelid, and the eyeball stood there naked.

Amycus' hotheaded squire Oreides
140wounded Talaus the son of Bias
but missed the kill, because his brazen spear tip
merely grazed the skin beneath the belt
and wholly missed the vitals. Then Aretus
leveled his weather-hardened club and thumped
145Iphitus, rugged scion of Eurytus.
But Iphitus was not yet doomed to die,
and soon enough Aretus was himself
cut down by Clytius' sword. Ancaeus,
the dauntless son of King Lycurgus, took up
150 (119)a massive ax and, with his left arm swinging
a shield of black-bear hide before him, leapt
fiercely into the fray. When Telamon
and Peleus, offspring of Aeacus, rushed in
behind him, warlike Jason joined their charge.

155Imagine how, upon a winter's day,

gray wolves will suddenly descend, unmarked
by herdsman and precision-sniffing hounds,
to terrorize a flock of countless sheep—
how, as the wolves glare back and forth deciding
160 which one to pounce on first and carry off,
the sheep stand clumped together, tripping over
each other—that's the way the heroes sent
grim panic through the proud Bebrycians.

And as when beekeepers or herdsman smoke
165 (131) a giant hive concealed in a rock,
the bees at first are crowded and confused,
abuzz with rage, and then the sooty coils
of vapor suffocate them, and they all
dart from the rock and scatter far and wide,
170 so the Bebrycians did not hold firm
for long, but fled in all directions, bearing
news of Amycus' demise. The fools
had not yet realized another crushing
disaster was at hand. That very day,
175 now that their king was dead, the hostile spears
of Lycus and his Mariandynians
were pillaging their villages and vineyards
(the two were rival peoples, always feuding
over a territory rich in iron).

180 (142) So the heroes raided all the stalls
and rounded up vast flocks and, as they did it,
this was how they were talking to each other:

"Just think of how those cowards would have fallen
if Zeus had somehow left us Heracles.
185 I am quite sure that, had he been at hand,
the boxing match would not have taken place.
No, when Amycus swaggered up to us
to bray his laws, a thumping would have made him
forget his pride and all his proclamations.
190 We did a thoughtless thing indeed by leaving
that man behind and heading out to sea.
Each one of us will come to know death ruin
intimately, now that he is gone."

That's how they talked, but Zeus, of course, had brought
195 (154) the loss of Heracles to pass on purpose.

The heroes spent the night there, bound the wounded,
and, after making sacrifice, prepared
a mighty banquet. After dinner, though,
slumber was far from holding sway beside
200the wine bowl and the blazing sacrifices.
Once they had crowned their golden hair with laurel
that grew along the same shore where the cables
were bound, the heroes sang a victory ode
in harmony with Orpheus' lyre,
205and the unruffled shore enjoyed their singing,
since they were celebrating Polydeuces,
the boy whom Zeus had fathered in Therapna.

But when the sun came over the horizon,
lit the dewy hills and roused the shepherds,
210 (166)the heroes lugged aboard the spoils that seemed
most useful, loosed the cables from the laurel,
and coasted with a friendly wind behind them
into the roiling Bosporus.

There wave
on wave, like heaven-climbing mountains reaching
215above the clouds, shoot up before a ship's prow,
hover a while and then come crashing down.
One would assume no vessel could endure
so dire a doom suspended like a savage
storm cloud above the mainmast. But these threats
220are navigable to a hardy helmsman.
So, guided by the skillful hands of Tiphys,
they coasted onward, frightened but alive,
and lashed their cables on the following day
to Thynia on the opposing coast.

225 (178)Phineus the son of Agenor
was living in a house there near the shore,
suffering more than any man alive
because of the prophetic skill Apollo
had granted him some years before. You see,
230he never paid due reverence to the gods,
not even Zeus himself, since he divulged
their sacred will too thoroughly to mortals.
Zeus smote him, therefore, with a long old age
and plucked the honeyed sunlight from his eyes.
235Still worse, he never could enjoy the lavish
banquets the locals heaped up in his house

when they arrived to ask their fortunes. Harpies
would always swoop down with rapacious maw
and snatch the food out of his hands and lips.
240 (189) Sometimes they left behind no food at all
and sometimes just a morsel, so that he
might go on living in despair. Still worse,
they left a foul stench on the leftovers,
and no one dared to lift them to his mouth
245 or even stand nearby, because they reeked
so hideously.

As soon as Phineus
discerned the heroes' footsteps and halloos,
he knew what men had come—those at whose coming
the oracle of Zeus had prophesied
250 he would again be able to enjoy
comfortable meals. He struggled out of bed
like an ethereal dream and then, propped on
a walking stick, tapped over to the door
by fingering his way along the walls.
255 (200) His joints were trembling with age and weakness
as he divined the exit. Scabrous skin
coated in dirt was all that held his bones
together. Once he reached the door, his knees
buckled. He crumpled on the courtyard threshold.
260 Dark dizziness enveloped him. The ground,
it seemed, was spinning, and he slipped away
into a torpor, helpless, speechless, still.

Soon as the heroes spotted him, they gathered
around in awe. After a while he sucked
265 a rasp up from the bottom of his lungs
and uttered prophecy unto them:

“Hear me,
bravest of the Hellenic heroes—that is,
if you are actually the men whom Jason
leads in the *Argo* questing for the fleece
270 (210) under the orders of a ruthless king.
Yes, it is you. My mind has grasped the fact
through divination. Racked by miserable
afflictions though I am, I still shall give
Apollo son of Leto proper credit.

275 By Zeus the guardian of suppliants
and sternest judge of sinful men, by Phoebus,

by Hera, too, who most of all the gods
protects your quest, I beg you, help me please!
Save an accursed man from degradation.
280 Please, oh, please, do not just sail away
and with indifference leave me as I am.
Not only has a Fury dug her feet
into my eyes, not only must I drag out
old age interminably day by day,
285 (222) but, in addition to these woes, a still
more bitter evil lurks above me: Harpies
swoop down from some exotic nest of spite
and rip the food out of my mouth. I know
no way I can relieve myself of them.
290 When famished for a meal, more easily
could I escape from my own mind than them,
so swiftly do they plummet through the air.

And even when they leave some scrap behind,
it breathes an odor putrid and unbearable.
295 No mortal could endure approaching it,
not even if his heart were forged of iron.
But bitter, cruel necessity compels me
to stay there all the same and, while I'm there,
force it into my miserable stomach.

300 (234) An oracle holds the sons of Boreas
shall stop the Harpies' aerial thefts and, trust me,
whoever does so will be dear to me,
that is, if I am still that Phineus known
for wealth and seercraft, and if indeed
305 I am my father's son, and if indeed,
when king of Thrace, I purchased Cleopatra
(the sister of you sons of Boreas)
with bridal gifts and brought her to my home."

So spoke the son of Agenor, and deep
310 compassion worked its way through all the heroes,
especially the sons of Boreas.
As soon as Zetes had repressed his tears,
he went up to the venerable man,
a man of sorrow, took his hand and said:

315 (244) "Sad old man, of all the men on Earth
not one, I swear, has suffered more than you.

Why have so many woes been heaped upon you?
Surely you must have uttered prophecies
in awful brashness to offend the gods
320and make them rage so violently against you.
Nevertheless, keen as we are to help,
the minds within us are uneasy, wondering
whether some god has truly offered us
this special honor. Here among us mortals
325gods' punishments hit all too close to home.
So, though we long to help you, we shall not
drive off the Harpies till you promise us
that we shall not incur the gods' disfavor
because of it."

So Zetes sought assurance.

330 (254)The old man opened up his empty orbs,
swiveled them round to him and answered,
"Hush,
my child. Don't fill your head with thoughts like those.
I call as witness Leto's son, the god
who kindly taught me the prophetic art;
335I call the dismal fate that is my lot,
to wit, this smoky cloud upon my eyes;
I call as well the Gods of Underground
(when I am dead, may they be kind to me)—
yes, in the names of all these powers, I swear
340the gods will not resent the help you give me."

After this oath the sons of Boreas
were keen to drive the Harpies off. Straightway
the younger heroes put a feast together,
the Harpies' final meal, and Calais
345 (265)and Zetes stood on either side of Phineus,
ready to snatch their weapons up as soon as
the Harpies swooped.

At just the very moment
the old man laid his hands on food, the Harpies
descended without warning from the clouds,
350like gales, like lightning, shrieking out their hunger.
The heroes shouted when they saw them coming
but, even as they shouted, *whoosh!* the creatures
had gobbled up the banquet and were gone
far, far away across the sea. The stench
355they left behind them was insufferable.
Nevertheless, the sons of Boreas

took sword in hand and flew off in pursuit.
Zeus gave them boundless speed. Without his help,
they never could have kept up since the Harpies
360 (277) had always outstripped even Zephyr's gales
both when they dived for Phineus and left him.
Imagine mastiffs on a mountainside,
pedigreed trackers, chasing goats and deer—
how, when their muzzles near the quarry's haunches,
365 their fangs can snap and snap to no avail,
that's how the brothers Calaïs and Zetes
swooped in behind the Harpies' tail feathers
and grazed them with their fingertips in vain.
They were at last quite close to catching them
370 way out above the Ever-Floating Isles
and surely would have cut the fiends to pieces,
contrary to the gods' intent, had not
swift Iris seen them, streaked out of the sky,
and halted them with these imperious terms:

375 (288) "Justice forbids you, sons of Boreas,
from touching with your swords almighty Zeus'
feathered hounds, the Harpies. But I here
do solemnly proclaim that they shall never
again return to bother Phineus."

380 She swore an oath upon the river Styx
(the gods' most firm and formidable pledge),
vowing the Harpies never in the future
would come and harry Phineus' house—
so had the Fates ordained. The brothers yielded
385 before the oath and turned around to fly
back to the ship, and still today men call
the islands where they turned the Turning Isles
and not the Floating Isles (their former name).
Then Iris and the Harpies parted ways:
390 (299) the latter to Minoan Crete to find
their cage again; the former fluttering
on rapid wings back up to Mount Olympus.

The men meanwhile were scrubbing years of foulness
off the old man's hide and sacrificing
395 sheep taken from the plunder of Amycus.
Once they had cooked them up, they held a banquet.
Phineus ate as well, and ravenously,

sating his lust as people do in dreams.
When they had dined and drunk themselves to fullness,
400the heroes stayed awake all night awaiting
Zetes and Calais. The aged seer
sat at the hearth among them, prophesying
how they should travel to complete their quest:

“Now heed me well. The gods do not permit you
405 (312)to know in detail all that is to come,
but what they do permit I shall reveal.
You see, I made an error long ago
by rashly prophesying Zeus’ plans
from start to finish. He himself insists
410humanity possess, through divination,
abridged foreknowledge, so that we are always
lacking some portion of divine intent.

When you depart from me, you will discern,
first off, the Cobalt Clashing Rocks, two headlands
415right where the estuary narrows. No one,
and I repeat, no one, has ever sailed
between them. Lacking deep bedrock to root them
into the ocean floor, they often crash
together into one, and briny spume
420 (323)boils above them, and the rugged shores
roar hoarsely. Therefore, if you are endowed
with prudent thoughts and truly fear the gods,
if you are not mere reckless adolescents
heading for a self-assured destruction,
heed my instructions now:

425Send out a dove
to fly before the ship and as an omen
test the Rocks. If it survives the flight
through them into the Pontus, all of you
no longer hold off on your outward journey
430but grip the oars solidly in your hands
and cleave that narrow stretch of sea. Survival
will then depend less on how hard you pray
than on how strong your hands are. Scorn distraction
and heave, heave all your strength into the oars—
435 (336)though, mind you, I do not forbid you prayer
before that time.

However, if the dove
dies halfway through, you may as well start sailing

for home again, since it is far, far better
to bow before god's will. No, even if
440 your ship had iron planks, you couldn't then
escape a dismal fate between the Rocks.
Unlucky men, do not then disregard
my prophecy, not even if you think
the gods upon Olympus loathe me three times
445 more than in fact they do—no, even if
you think they loathe me more than that—do not
defy the dove and push the *Argo* onward.
What will come to pass will come to pass.

But if you do outrun the Rocks' concussion
450 (346) and coast, unscathed, into the Pontic Sea,
sail with the land of the Bithynians
to port and guard against the barrier reefs
until you round the swiftly flowing Rhebas
and Sable Promontory and at last
455 make landfall on the Isle of Thynias.
From Thynias row out across the sea
and put in at the Mariandynian land
opposite. There a footpath switchbacks down
to Hades, and the Acherousian headland
460 pierces the sky, and Acheron's white spate
shoots out of an unfathomable chasm
and flows back down by cutting through the cape.
Once you have passed this river, you will pass
the uplands of the Paphlagonians.
465 (359) Their patriarch was Eneteian Pelops—
such is the blood that courses through their veins.

There, underneath the astral Bear Helica,
a headland rises steep on all sides round.
Carambis is its name. The seaward face
470 projects so high that Boreas' squalls
split on its summit. You will find the Long Shore
stretching beyond it. At the farther end,
beyond a jutting cape, the river Halys
disgorges a bewilderment of froth.
475 Not at all far from there, the Iris drains
its less tumultuously churning current
into the sea. Still farther on from there
a large, sharp cape projects out of the coast.
Beyond it you will find the Thermodon,

480 (370)which, after wandering across the mainland,
ends in a tranquil harbor at the base
of the Themiscyreian promontory.
Here are the steppes of Doeas, and the three
forts of the Amazons that stand upon them.

485Next you will reach those miserable wretches
the Chalybes who live upon a pinched,
illiberal soil. They are heavy drudges,
workers in iron. Tibarenians,
men rich in sheep, dwell on a plain nearby
490beneath the Genetaen cape, a site
sacred to Zeus the God of Guests and Hosts.

Next in line and neighbors to these men
the Mossynoeci dwell on woodland plains
and mountain spurs and cols. They build their homes
495 (381)from bark inside of towers made of timber,
rugged towers. They call the things 'mossynes'
and take their name from them.

Once you have passed them,
make landfall on the barren isle nearby,
but only after using every means
500to drive off the repugnant, homicidal
birds who nest on it in countless numbers.
Here Otrera and Antiope,
two Amazonian queens, once built a shrine
in Ares' name when they were on campaign.
505Here from the unforgiving sea a boon
will come to you, a boon I dare not name.
Still, I exhort you with benign insistence
to harbor there. Why should I go too far
a second time with my prophetic art?
510 (391)Why tell you everything from start to finish?

Beyond this island and the facing coastline
dwell the Philyres; the Macrones next,
and next in turn the multitudinous tribes
of the Becheirians. Next in order
515dwell the Sapeires, the Byzeri, then
the warlike Colchians themselves at last.

Still, you should travel farther on until
you reach the limit of the Pontic Sea.

Here on the mainland near the city Cyta
520 the raucous Phasis, after racing down
the Amaranthian mountains and across
the plain of Circe, empties liberally
into the sea.

While rowing up that river
you will discern the towers of Aeetes
525 (403) at Cyta, and the gloomy grove of Ares
where a serpent dreadful to behold,
a monster, glares all round, forever guarding
the fleece that lies across an oak tree's crown.
Neither day nor night does honeyed slumber
530 vanquish the thing's insatiable surveillance."

Such was his prophecy, and terror gripped
the heroes. Long they stood there gaping, dumbstruck.
At last the son of Aeson, at a loss
before the terror of it all, spoke out:

535 "Venerable man, thus far you have foretold
the ways and worries of our quest's completion
and warned us of the omen we must heed
when passing through those dreadful Clashing Rocks
into the Pontic Sea. But I am eager
540 (414) to learn as well if we must suffer through them
a second time while sailing back to Greece.
How can I do it? How can I survive
a second endless journey through the sea?
I am an untried man, my comrades, too,
545 are untried men, and Colchian Aea
lies at the limit of the Pontic Sea,
the far end of the earth!"

So Jason spoke.
The hoary prophet uttered in response:

"Once you have passed those deadly Rocks alive,
550 my son, have confidence. Some god will guide you
along a different path out of Aea,
and on the way there you'll have guides enough.
But I advise you, friends, do not dismiss
the goddess Cypris and her slippery
555 (424) assistance, since the glorious fulfillment
of your adventure lies with her. No further,
ask me no further questions on these matters."

Among them was a certain man, Paraebius,
Phineus' most devoted friend,
and he was glad to find the strangers there
because the seer had long ago proclaimed
600 (459) a band of heroes on a voyage bound
from Hellas to Aeëtes' citadel
would tie their cables to the Thynian land
and, with divine approval, stop the Harpies
from landing there. Once Phineus had sated
605 these guests with prudent words, he sent them out
and asked Paraebius alone to stay
among the heroes. Then he sent him out
to lead the finest sheep out of the folds.
Once he had left them, Phineus explained
610 gently about him to the gathered oarsmen:

"My friends, not everyone is arrogant
and heedless of a favor done to him.
This man, such as he is, once came to me
to learn about his destiny. You see,
615 (471) though he had labored much and struggled more,
an ever-growing scarcity of means
kept grinding him away. Day after day
matters were worse for him until no ease
relieved his toil.

In fact, he had been paying
620 the dire wages of his father's error.
One day his father, in the act of felling
trees in the mountains, scorned a wood nymph's plea.
You see, she had been weeping, begging him
please not to chop her oak tree down, her age-mate.
625 She had been living in its trunk and boughs
for many years. He was a young man, though,
and scornful, so he rashly cut it down.
The wood nymph fixed the fate of constant failure
on him and all his heirs as retribution.

630 (484) When Paraebius, that fellow's son,
came to me, I discerned the curse and told him
to build an altar to that Thynian nymph
and lavish gifts upon it in atonement,
begging her, all the while, please to forgive
635 his father's malice. Ever since he slipped
that god-sent doom, he has remembered me.

In fact, whenever I excuse him for a time,
he grudgingly departs, so scrupulous
is he in standing by me in my troubles.”

640 So Phineus explained, and there he was,
Paraebius, at hand again, returning
with two sheep chosen from his master's sheepfold.
Jason arose and, at the old man's bidding,
the sons of Boreas stood up beside him.

645 (493) Then, calling on Apollo God of Prophets,
Phineus slew the victims on the hearth
just as the day was drawing to a close.
The younger men prepared a heartening feast
for their companions. When they all had eaten,
650 some went to sleep among the *Argo's* cables,
others in clusters all throughout the house.

That morning the Etesian Winds arose.
These are the winds that blow throughout the world
with equal strength, at the behest of Zeus.

655 A maiden named Cyrene, it is said,
once tended sheep among the men of yore
along the flats of the Peneus River.

She plied this trade because virginity
was sweet to her, and an untainted bed.

660 (503) One day, while she was pasturing her flocks
along the riverbank, Apollo snatched her
up from Haemonia and set her down

among the nymphs who dwell in Libya
beside the Hill of Myrtles. There she bore
665 Phoebus a child, a son named Aristaeus
(though men in barley-rich Haemonia
know him as Agreus and Nomius).

The god so loved Cyrene that he made her
an ageless huntress in her newfound land.

670 He carried off the child, though, to be brought up
in Cheiron's cave. When he was grown, the Muses
arranged his marriage and instructed him
in all the arts of prophecy and healing.

They also made him keeper of the sheep

675 (514) that grazed the Athamantian plain of Phthia
beside steep Othrys and the holy-flowing
Apidanus.

When down out of the heavens

the Dog Star Sirius was searing all
the isles of Minos, and for many days
680the locals suffered but could find no cure,
they begged assistance from the oracle
of Phoebus, who commanded them to summon
Aristaeus to expel the drought.

So, at his father's bidding, he set forth
685from Phthia, rounded up some Parrhasians
(who are, in fact, the heirs of Lycaon),
and settled them in Ceos. There he raised
a mighty shrine to Zeus the God of Rain
and duly offered on the mountaintops
690 (524)sacrifice to the Dog Star Sirius
and Zeus the son of Cronus. That is why
Etesian winds descend from Zeus to cool
the earth for forty days, and still today
the priests in Ceos offer sacrifice
695before the Dog Star Sirius appears.
So runs the story of the winds.

The heroes

were held up there awhile and, every day
they stayed, the Thynians sent them countless presents
to thank them for relieving Phineus.
700Then, once the gales had calmed, they built an altar
in honor of the twelve immortal gods
on the opposing shore, heaped it with gifts,
boarded the *Argo*, and began to row.
And they did not forget to bring along
705 (536)a bashful dove—Euphemus was the one
who seized it, frightened, trembling, in his hand.
Then they unbound the cables from the land.

Nor did Athena fail to mark their heading.
All in an instant she had set her feet
710upon an airy cloudlet that provided
swift conveyance, weighty though she was,
and so she hastened to the Pontic Sea
to do the crew a favor. When a man
goes traveling outside his fatherland
715(as we long-suffering mortals often do),
no land seems out of reach, the ways and means
shine in his mind, and he can see his house
and picture traveling by path and channel
and with his swift thoughts visit now one country

720 (546)and now another in imagination,
so Zeus' daughter leapt out of the cloud
and instantly set foot upon the hostile
Thynian shore.

Soon as the heroes reached
the narrows of the mazy strait, they found
725sharp outcrops closing in on either side
and hectic whirlpools churning up white water
around the ship. They made their way in horror.
The rumble of the Clashing Rocks already
assailed their senses, and the sea-washed headlands
echoed the noise.

730Euphemus then ascended
the prow beam, dove in hand, and all the oarsmen,
under the orders of the steersman Tiphys,
rowed at their ease to save up strength enough
to pull them through the crisis. When the heroes
735 (560)rounded the final bend, they saw the Rocks
dividing, and their spirit drained away.

Euphemus launched the dove, which on its wings
shot forth and flew between the ranks of oarsmen.
They turned their heads to watch it go, and then
740the two rock faces crashed together. Spouts
of seething spray shot upward like a mist,
the sea was far from cheerful in its roaring,
and everywhere the mighty air was trembling.
Down at the Rocks' foundations hollow sea caves
745boomed as the brine came boiling up within them.
The white spume of the falling waves erupted
above the Rocks, and riptides spun the ship.
Still, though the twin peaks nipped her hindmost feathers,
the dove got clear—she made it through alive.

750 (573)The oarsmen raised a hearty cheer, and Tiphys
commanded them to row with all their strength
because the Rocks were opening again.
Trembling seized them as they heaved, but soon
the same wave as before propelled them forward,
755with its returning wash, between the Rocks.
Insufferable dread took hold of them:
the doom impending there on either side
seemed inescapable. Though for a moment
the level Pontus shimmered far and wide

760beyond the Rocks, a sudden wave arose
before them, vaulted like a steep cliff face.
They cocked their heads to duck because it seemed
that arching wall of froth would soon collapse
onto the deck and swamp them. Just in time, though,
765 (584)Tiphys reined the ship in as it labored
under the oars. The great wave slithered off
beneath the keel but, with its passing, lifted
the stern into the air and dragged the *Argo*
back outside the Clashing Rocks.

Euphemus

770walked the deck commanding his companions
to pour their strength into the oars. Groaning,
they struck the water. But whatever headway
the *Argo* made by rowing, it retreated
twice as far, and, as the heroes heaved,
775the oars bent under them like back-bent bows.
A sudden wave then rushed them from behind,
and *Argo* coasted on the crest as smoothly
as if it were a sanded wooden roller.
So they proceeded through the air until
780 (595)a whirlpool sucked them in and spun them round
between the agitated Clashing Rocks.
The hull was sea-stuck.

So Athena braced

her left hand on a crag for leverage
and with her right shoved *Argo* from the stern.
785The ship went flying like a swift-winged arrow,
and, when the Rocks came hurtling together,
they only nipped the stern post's tip abaft.

Once they had gotten through alive, Athena
flew back to Mount Olympus, and the Rocks
790were rooted firmly in one place forever,
just as the gods had fated would occur
whenever someone saw them clash together
and still sailed through them to the other side.

The heroes caught their breath at last, shook off
795 (607)the chill of horror, then surveyed the sky
and flat sea stretching eastward out of view.
They felt as if they had escaped from Hades.

Tiphys was first to find his voice again:

“It was the ship itself, I think, that pulled us
800out of that pinch. Athena, though, deserves
the highest praise, since it was she who breathed
magical strength into the hull when Argus
was pounding dowels home into the planks.
Wrecking this ship would be like sacrilege.
805Now that a god has helped us to escape
those dreadful Clashing Rocks, no longer worry
about fulfilling Pelias’ demands.
Phineus son of Agenor predicted
that, after this, our voyage would be easy.”

810 (619)So Tiphys reassured them as he steered
the ship through open sea beside the land
of the Bithynians. But Jason answered
with subtle words and sidelong purpose:

“Tiphys,
why are you trying to console my grief?
815I’ve made a horrid and unpardonable
blunder. When Pelias proposed the challenge,
I should have turned this journey down at once,
even if death, a savage death by torture,
was waiting for me. Now I wear a shroud
820of fear and dread past bearing—loathing travel
across the frigid sea but loathing, too,
the thought of landing, since the local tribesmen
are hostile everywhere. Night after night,
since first you all assembled for my sake,
825 (631)I have been spending wretched hours obsessing
over these worries. Each of you can speak
with unencumbered ease because you fear
for your one life alone, while I, your leader,
don’t care a whit about my own but worry
830for each and every hero on this quest:
What if I fail to bring him back to Hellas?”

So he proclaimed to test his comrades’ mettle.
When they responded with enthusiastic
bellows and whoops, the heart grew warm within him.
835When he spoke again, he spoke with candor:

“Dear friends, my courage thrives on your devotion.
Even if I should now be traveling
into the mouth of Hades, fear would never

take hold of me, because you all have proved
840 (644)steadfast in time of crisis. Now that we
have sailed beyond the Clashing Rocks, I think
no future threat will be as great, so long
as we abide by Phineus' instructions."

Thus he encouraged them, and they at once
845gave over conversation and returned
wholeheartedly to rowing. Soon they passed
the rapid Rhebas and Colona's peak,
the Sable Promontory and at last
the Phyllis River's mouth where, years before,
850Dipascus kindly welcomed to his halls
Athamas' son Phrixus who was fleeing
Orchomenus, his hometown, on the ram.
Because a meadow nymph had borne Dipascus,
weapons and war did not appeal to him,
855 (656)no, he preferred to settle with his mother
beside the waters of his father's river
and graze his flocks along the shore.

The heroes,
in passing, gazed upon his monument,
the wide banks of the Phyllis, then the plain
860beside it and the roiling Kalpa River.
The sun set, and they spent the windless night
just as they had been, heaving at the oars.
Imagine oxen laboring to furrow
muddy acres, how a spume of sweat
865drips from their necks and flanks: their eyes roll sideways
under the yoke, and constant panting scours
their arid throats and issues from their mouths.
All day they churn the earth, digging their hooves in—
that's the way the heroes heaved the oars
out of the ocean swell.

870 (669)At just the hour
when ambrosial dawn has not quite come
but there is not full darkness, since a haze
has crept into the night (that is, the hour
that early risers call "the morning twilight"),
875the heroes rowed up to the desert island
of Thynias and with an insurmountable
weariness slogged ashore. The son of Leto
revealed himself there. He was leaving Lycia
and striding far away toward the expansive

880 dominions of the Hyperboreans.
And, as he moved, clusters of golden hair
swung loose and swept down over either cheek.
His left hand brandishing a silver bow,
a quiver hanging from his shoulder down
885 (679) across his back, he trod his course. The island
quaked with each footstep, and the breakers washed up
onto the beaches. As they watched him, helpless
amazement seized them all, and no one dared
to look directly at his dazzling eyes.
890 They stood a long time gazing at the ground,
while he, aloof, proceeded through the air
across the sea. Some minutes later Orpheus
found his voice and said to his companions:

“Come now, and let us dedicate this island
895 to Phoebus God of Dawn and name it for him
since it was here that we have seen him passing
before us as the sunrise. We shall build
a seaside shrine and give what offerings
we can procure. Afterward, if he grants us
900 (690) a safe homecoming in Haemonia,
we shall repay him with the burned thighbones
of hornéd goats. Now we must satisfy him
as best we can, with liquid offerings
and the aroma of the roast. O god,
905 O revelation, please advance our quest.”

So he instructed them. Some right away
went to construct an altar out of stones
while others scoured the island in pursuit
of goat and deer, the sorts that commonly
910 reside in forests. Leto's son provided
good hunting, and they duly immolated
two thighbones from each kill upon the altar.

Then, as the meat was cooking, they performed
a choral dance in honor of Apollo,
915 (702) the little boy, the Shooter of the Arrow.
The admirable offspring of Oeagrus
plucked his Bistonian lyre and started singing
how long ago Apollo on Parnassus
felled the beast Delphina with an arrow,
920 and he did this while still a naked toddler,

still delighting in his curly hair
(Be gracious, lord, I beg you. Eternally
your tresses are unshorn, eternally.
It's sacred law that only Leto, daughter
925of Coeus, strokes them with her loving hands),
and the Corycian nymphs, the seed of Pleistus,
over and over urged the toddler on
by shouting *Hie* ("Shoot"), from which derives
the lovely ritual cry to summon Phoebus.

930 (713)After the heroes celebrated him
with choral song, they poured out pure libations,
laid their hands upon the festal meat,
and swore an oath always to aid each other
with singleness of purpose. Still today
935the shrine of kindly Harmony remains there,
the very one the heroes instituted
in honor of a venerable goddess.

Then, when the third dawn broke, they left the steep-cliffed
island with a strong west wind behind them.

940That day they passed on the opposing coast
the mouth of the Sangarius, the buxom
Mariandynian fields, the Lycus River's
ecstatic spate, and Lake Anthemoesis,
and all the halyards and the tackle strained
945 (725)before the gale as they went sailing onward.
The wind, though, started flagging in the night
and they were much relieved to reach at dawn
a bay inside the Acherousian headland,
a steep cape facing the Bithynian Sea.

950The surf rolls in uproariously around
the polished boulders rooted to its base,
and plane trees flourish all across the crest
from which a hollow dale slopes gently inland.
Within that dale a cave that leads to Hades
955lurks behind rocks and shrubs, and from its depths
a chilling vapor rises every morning
and gathers in a glistening frost that thaws
beneath the midday sun. Never does silence
descend upon this gloomy cape because
960 (741)the restless sea stirs up a constant murmur
and subterranean breezes rouse the trees.

A river has its mouth here—Acheron,
which, following the valley from the crest,
cuts through the middle of the cape and empties
965 into the Eastern Sea. Megarians
out of Nisaea later dubbed this cape
“The Sailors’ Savior” since it saved their ship
from a horrendous storm when they were sailing
to colonize the Mariandynian land.

970 Because the wind had recently died down
the Minyans were keen to row the *Argo*
inside this breakwater and moor it there.
The Mariandynians and their leader Lycus
were not long unaware the soldiers anchored
975 (754) upon their shores were those who killed Amycus,
or so they had been told, and for that reason
they struck a truce, saluted Polydeuces,
and welcomed him as if he were a god.
They had, you see, for quite some time been waging
980 war on the insolent Bebrycians.

When the heroes came to town, they feasted
a whole day at the court of Lycus, forged
the bonds of friendship, and relieved their hearts
with conversation. Jason named the names
985 and pedigrees of each of his companions,
explained what mission Pelias had set them,
how the Lemnian women welcomed them,
and all that happened with the Doliones
and Cyzicus their king. He also told him
990 (766) how, when they came to Mysia and the Cius,
they happened to abandon Heracles,
what prophecies the sea god Glaucus gave them,
and how they beat Amycus and his people.
Next he recounted Phineus’ woes
995 and prophecies and how they had survived
the Clashing Rocks and, only lately, spotted
the son of Leto rising from an island.

King Lycus took heartfelt delight in hearing
all these adventures just as they had happened,
1000 but sorrow gripped him when he heard the news
of the abandonment of Heracles,
and he commiserated with the heroes:

“Friends, you have lost a great man’s help by losing
Heracles the hero in the midst of
1005 (775) your lengthy voyage to Aeëtes’ palace.
Heracles was my friend, in fact. I met him
here in my father Dascylus’ house
long, long ago when he was traveling
through boundless Asia on a quest to win
1010 the belt of war-obsessed Hippolyta.

I was a young man when we met. The down
had only freshly sprouted on my cheeks,
and funeral games were being held in honor
of Priolas my brother. (Mysians killed him,
1015 and since his death the people here have sung him
heartrending dirges.) In the boxing match
Heracles beat the dashing Titias,
who was supreme among us younger men
in strength and beauty. Yes, he knocked his teeth out
onto the ground.

1020 (786) Heracles subjugated
the Mysians beneath my father’s rule,
then the Mygdones who are neighbors to us,
then some Bithynians and their land as far as
the Rhebas River and Colona’s peak.
1025 In fact, the Paphlagonian heirs of Pelops
(that is, those hemmed in by the dark Billaeus)
surrendered without putting up a fight.

Lately, with Heracles gone far away,
haughty Amycus and his subject soldiers
1030 had started cheating me, for years now chipping
such large tracts from my realm that they have pushed
their kingdom’s borders to the grass that lines
the deeply flowing Hypius River.

Now, though,
they have received their punishment from you,
1035 (798) and I suspect the gods were there supporting
Tyndareus’ son the day he beat
Amycus and defeated all his henchman
in battle. Therefore I shall gladly give you
whatever help I can, since this is simply
1040 what weaker men should do when stronger men
have done a good turn first. And I shall order
Dascylus my son to join your quest.

With him among you, you should find the natives
you meet along the way hospitable
1045as far off as the river Thermodon.

Furthermore, I shall build a lofty temple
atop the Acherousian heights to honor
Tyndareus' sons, and every sailor
who sees their shrine, even from far away,
1050 (809)will ask their aid. Once I have built the temple,
I shall consecrate, outside the city,
some fertile acres in our well-tilled plains
to yield them honor as if they were gods."

All day the heroes took delight in feasting,
1055then bustled back down to the ship. King Lycus
gathered his train to follow them and gave them
numberless gifts. What's more, he sent his son
to make the quest among them.

It was then
that Idmon son of Abas reached his destined
1060demise. Though he excelled at seercraft,
his seercraft did not protect him, no,
necessity was pushing him toward doom.

There was a meadow near a reedy river.
A white-tusked boar was lounging in it, cooling
1065 (819)its flanks and massive belly in the mud—
a lethal beast. Even the marsh nymphs feared it
feeding alone along the river flats.
No mortal knew that it was there.

When Idmon
was strolling on the muddy riverbank,
1070it rushed out of some purlieu in the willows,
gored his thigh, cut through cartilage and femur.
Idmon shrieked and fell. His friends called out,
and Peleus quickly loosed a spear and struck
the monster as it fled into the swamp.
1075When it returned and charged them, Idas pierced it,
and it collapsed upon the sharp tip, squealing.
Leaving it thus impaled, they trundled Idmon
back to the *Argo* where he coughed up blood
and shortly died in his inconsolable
comrades' arms.

1080 (835)They thought no more of sailing

but stayed there, grieving, to entomb the body.
Three days they wailed and on the fourth interred him
with hero's honors. Lycus and his subjects
joined in the mourning, slaughtered many sheep
1085as funeral offerings around the tomb,
as is the custom for the dear departed.
So in a foreign country Idmon's barrow
was heaped up, and a marker planted on it
for future generations to admire—
1090a wild olive tree, the tree of shipwrights,
a tree that still is flourishing today
under the Acherousian cliffs.

Because

I heed the Muses' will, I must declare,
upfront, this fact as well: Phoebus Apollo
1095 (847)commanded the Boeotians and Niseans
to worship Idmon as a city founder
and build a town around his barrow tree.
Today, though, all the Mariandynians there
venerate Agamestor rather than
1100god-fearing Idmon, Aeolus' grandson.

Who else died there? (The heroes surely raised
a second barrow for a fallen comrade
because two mounds are standing to this day.)

Tiphys it was, the son of Hagnias—
1105so runs the story. It was not his fate
to steer the *Argo* farther toward its goal.
Once they had buried Idmon, a malignant
disease afflicted Tiphys, left him prostrate
and bedrid far, far, from his fatherland.
1110 (858)Struck by these dreadful blows, the men gave way
to absolute despair. Once they had buried
this second fallen comrade, they collapsed
beside the sea in utter helplessness,
shrouded their bodies tightly in their cloaks,
1115and lost all love of food and drink. Grief-stricken,
they threw their hearts away because returning
to Greece was now outside their expectations.

They would have stayed there, grieving, even longer
had Hera not stepped in and filled Ancaeus
1120with special bravery. Astypylaia

conceived him underneath the god Poseidon
and birthed him next to the Imbrasus River,
and he was wise in all the ways of seacraft.
This fellow rushed to Peleus and said:

1125 (869) “Son of Aeacus, how can it be noble
to rest a long time in a foreign land,
shirking our task? Surely the son of Aeson
recruited me out of Parthenia
to undertake this journey for the fleece
1130 more for my expertise in steering ships
than making war. Therefore, don’t have the slightest
fear for the *Argo*. There are expert sailors
among us, none of whom would wreck the voyage
if we should set him at the helm. Go swiftly,
1135 tell our comrades all these things, be firm,
force them to think again about the quest.”

So he explained, and Peleus’ spirit
leapt with delight, and he was quick to shout:

“Why, comrades, are we clinging to a sorrow
1140 (881) as profitless as this? These two have died,
I think, the death they were allotted. Think, now,
there are other steersmen in our crew,
a number of them, so stop wasting time,
cast off your woes and rouse yourselves for labor.”

1145 Jason had nothing but despair to offer:

“Son of Aeacus, where are all these helmsmen?
Those we regarded as our guides and experts
are lying there more dead to hope than I am.
Thus I foresee an evil ending for us
1150 beside our fallen friends if we can neither
reach the city of extreme Aeëtes
nor pass beyond the Rocks again and back
to Greece. An evil fate, one without glory,
will hide us here to age in idleness.”

1155 (894) So he lamented, but Ancaeus promptly
offered himself as helmsman of the *Argo*.
A god’s encouragement had urged him on.
Next, Nauplius, Erginus, and Euphemus

stood up in eagerness to man the tiller,
1160but others held them back because Ancaeus
was favored by the bulk of the assembly.

Therefore at sunrise, after twelve days mourning,
they boarded, since a stiff west wind was blowing.
Quickly they rowed out through the Acheron,
1165then trusted in the wind, unfurled the canvas,
and, with the sail spread taut, went coasting onward,
cleaving their way in favorable weather.
Soon they passed the mouth of Callichorus,
“River of Gorgeous Dancing.”

It was here,
1170 (905)they say, that the Nysaeon son of Zeus,
after departing from the Indic tribes
and settling at Thebes, initiated
secret rites and set up choral dances
before the cave where he had once spent mirthless,
1175unearthly nights. Ever since then the locals
have called the nearby river “Gorgeous Dancing”
and the cave “The Hostel.”

Next they sighted
the tomb of Sthenelus the son of Aktor.
While he was marching homeward after waging
1180glorious war upon the Amazons
(he had gone there with Heracles), an arrow
struck him and laid him dead upon the beach.
The heroes sailed no farther for a time
because Persephone herself had sent up
1185 (917)Sthenelus’ shade. With tears and wailing
the ghost had begged her, please, please, let him see,
just for a little, soldiers like himself.

Watching them from the barrow’s crest, he seemed
such as he was when first he went to war—
1190a four-billed, formidable helmet gleaming
upon his head, its crest a deep dark red.
Then he descended back into the gloom.
The heroes marveled at the vision. Mopsus
son of Ampycus saw it as a sign
1195and urged the men to beach the ship and honor
the hero with libations.

So they furled
the sail, ran the hawsers to the beach,

and paid homage to Sthenelus' tomb
by pouring offerings and sacrificing
1200 (927) sheep to his shade. They also raised, nearby,
an altar to Apollo Ship-Preserver
and burned thigh pieces on it. Orpheus
enshrined a lyre there as well—that's why
the spot is known as Lyra to this day.

1205 Then, since the wind was calling, they embarked,
unfurled the sail, and used the sheets to pull it
taut, and the *Argo* coasted out to sea
with bellied canvas, as on lofted wings
a hawk goes coasting swiftly through the air,
1210 its pennons poised and level. Like a hawk, then,
the *Argo* passed the seaward-flowing stream
Parthenius, a very gentle river.
Artemis often stops there after hunting
and bathes her body in its soothing waters
1215 (939) before she joins the gods upon Olympus.

They coasted without pausing all night long,
skirting Seisamus, rugged Erythini,
Cromna, Crobialus, tree-lined Cytorus.
Just as the sun first cast its beams they rounded
1220 Carambis and were pushing past the Long Shore
the whole day through, the whole night under oar,
until they beached on the Assyrian coast.

Here Zeus himself had settled Sinopa
the daughter of Asopus and allowed her
1225 lasting virginity, but only after
she hoodwinked him with his own lover's oaths.
When he was aching for her love, he promised
to give her anything her heart desired,
and, clever girl, she asked for maidenhood.
1230 (952) When Phoebus tried in turn to lie with her,
she tricked him in the same way, then deceived
Halys the River God as well. What's more,
no mortal ever stole her innocence
with vehement caresses.

On this coast

1235 three sons of brave Deimarchus the Triccean—
Deileon, Phlogius, and Autolycus—
had camped out ever since they lost their comrade

Heracles. As soon as they discerned
the party of heroic men, they ran
1240to meet them and explain their destitution.
They did not desire to be marooned there
forever, so they climbed aboard, and soon
a stiff nor'wester started blowing.

So,

with new recruits, the heroes took to sea
1245 (962)before the eager gale and coasted past
the Halys River, then the nearby Iris,
then the sandy delta of Assyria.

That day they also rounded, at a distance,
the cape that guards the Amazonian harbor
1250where the hero Heracles once ambushed
Melanippa daughter of the war god
when she went traveling abroad. Her sister
Hippolyta was quick to pay the ransom,
and he returned her safe and sound.

Because

1255the sea had turned too turbulent for travel,
the heroes anchored at the harbor where
the Thermodon goes down into the sea.
There is no river like the Thermodon,
none that divides into as many branches.
1260 (974)Reckon them up, the tally would be only
four shy of a hundred. But the true
headwater is a single stream that tumbles
down mountains called the "Amazonian Heights"
onto a lowland where it multiplies,
1265its rills meandering this way, that way,
one near, one far, each seeking lower ground.
Most of them dissipate anonymously,
but several merge to form the Thermodon,
which hurls itself, a vaulted span of froth,
into the Hostile Sea.

1270The men might well

have lingered for a time there, making war
upon the Amazons, and they would surely
have suffered losses if they had because
the Amazons in the Doean plain
1275 (987)were not at all docile and civilized.
Savage aggression and the works of Ares
were all their care. In fact, they claimed descent
from Ares and the nymph Harmonia.

She bedded down beside him in a dale
1280in the Acmonian woods and bore him daughters
that dote on war.

But, under Zeus' sway,
the northwest wind returned and pushed the heroes
beyond a cape where other Amazons,
Themiscyreans, girt their loins for battle.
1285The Amazons, you see, did not inhabit
one city but were settled separately
in three tribes scattered all throughout the land:
those called Themiscyreans lived in one part
under the warrior queen Hippolyta,
1290 (999)the Lycastians settled in another,
and the spear-mad Chadesians a third.

During the next day and the following night
the heroes skirted Chalybian country.
Pushing teams of oxen through the fields
1295and sowing thought-sweetening plants and trees
hold no appeal for the Chalybes.
They cleave dense, iron-bearing soil instead
and barter what they find for wares and produce.
Dawn never rises for them without toil,
1300more toil, unending toil in soot and smoke.

After the Chalybes, the heroes rounded
the Cape of Zeus God of the Genes River
and passed the country of the Tibarenians.
Here, when a woman is with child, her husband
1305 (1013)wraps his own head in towels, lies in bed,
and howls, and his woman brings him food
and draws and boils a childbirth bath for him.

After the Tibarenians they passed
a sacred mountain and the country where
1310the Mossynoeci dwell along the slopes
in towers or the "mossynes" they take their name from.
Odd laws and customs mark their way of life.
Everything that we do out in the open
either in council or the marketplace,
1315they find some way to do inside their homes,
and all the things we do inside our homes,
they do out in the middle of the street
without the least compunction. Public sex

is not disgraceful there. Like boars in heat,
1320 (1024) they feel not even slight embarrassment
with others present but engage their women
in open copulation on the ground.
Their ruler sits inside the highest tower,
rendering personal verdicts to his subjects—
1325 poor wretch, since, if his rulings seem unfair,
they lock him up in prison for a day
without a meal.

After the Mossynoeci,
they labored dead ahead toward Ares' Island,
hacking their course with oars all day because
1330 the gentle breeze had left them in the night.
And then they spotted one of Ares' birds,
the special breed indigenous to the island,
flitting back and forth above their heads.
With one wing pump above the moving ship,
1335 (1036) it launched a tapered feather dart, which struck
the left shoulder of noble Oileus.
Injured, he dropped his oar, and his companions
sat awestruck gaping at the tufted shaft.
His bench mate Eurybotes yanked it out,
1340 unhitched the sword belt running through his scabbard,
and bound the wound. Soon, though, a second fowl
was circling like the first. This time the hero
Clytius, the offspring of Eurytus,
because he had his longbow nocked and ready,
1345 released a speedy arrow, struck the bird,
and brought it, spinning, down into the sea
beside the heaving *Argo*. Amphidamus
son of Aleus spoke his mind among them:

"Now the Isle of Ares is at hand.
1350 (1047) You yourselves, doubtless, guessed the news already,
since we have met the birds. I doubt that arrows
will be enough to get us to the shore,
so let us come up with a plan—that is,
if you respect the words of Phineus
and still intend a landfall here.

1355 Not even
Heracles, when passing through Arcadia,
had strength enough to drive off with his bow
the birds that rode on the Stymphalian slough.
I saw it all myself. No, what he did

1360was stand atop a rock and make a racket
by shaking copper rattles—all the birds
fled from the noise in terror and confusion.

We should devise some similar arrangement,
and I will tell you what I have in mind:

1365 (1060)let's all set on our heads our high-plumed helmets,
and half our number, every other of us,
mind the rowing, while the other half
walls off the ship with polished spears and shields.
Then we should all raise so grotesque an uproar
1370that they scatter at the strangeness of it—
the ruckus, bobbing crests, and brandished spears.
And if we make it to the island, then
make noise by clattering your shields together.”

So he proposed, and everyone accepted
1375his prudent plan. They set atop their heads
helmets forged from brightly glinting bronze
with crimson feathers flickering above them.
Half of the heroes plied the oars, and half
covered the *Argo's* deck with shields and spears.
1380 (1073)As when a fellow roofs his house with tile
to trim it and protect against the rain,
and each tile dovetails snugly with the next,
so half the heroes locked their shields together
and roofed the ship. The clangor that arose
1385from ship to air resembled the percussion
that rises from opposing hordes when soldiers
dash together, and the ranks collide.
Soon enough, every single bird had vanished.

But when the heroes neared the shore and clashed
1390their shields, thousands of them of a sudden
took to the air and flew in all directions.
Just as the son of Cronus shoots thick hail
down out of thunderheads onto the homes
of people sitting patiently inside,
1395 (1085)listening to the rattle at their ease
because the stormy months are no surprise,
and they have wisely reinforced their roofs,
so did the birds rain feathered missiles down
as they went flying off across the ocean
1400toward the massifs that mark the world's end.

But what did Phineus really have in mind
in telling that divine brigade of heroes
to anchor there? What benefit would come
to them thereafter, as they hoped it might?

1405The sons of Phrixus had embarked upon
a Colchian ship and sailed out of Aea,
away from Cyta and Aeëtes, hoping
to reach the city of Orchomenus
and win the boundless riches of their father.

1410 (1096)This voyage was his dying proclamation.

But, on the day they neared the Isle of Ares,
Zeus urged the potent north wind on to blow
and marked Arcturus' wet route with showers.
All day long he gently shook the topmost
1415leaves of the mountain forests but at night
swooped monstrosly down upon the sea
with shriek and bluster puffing up the tide.
A dark mist veiled the heavens, and the stars
did not shine anywhere beyond the clouds.
1420A murky gloom was brooding all around.

Half-drowned and dreading an abysmal death,
the sons of Phrixus weltered at the waves' whim.
The gales had long since snatched their sails away,
the roll shaken the ship, the hull broken
1425 (1110)in half, and now, just as the gods had planned,
the four of them were clinging to some flotsam
tightly fitted dowels had held together
when the ship broke up.

The wind and waves
carried the helpless men off toward the island,
1430and they were close to drowning. Then another
horrendous squall erupted, and the rain
assailed the sea, the island, and the whole
coastline opposing it as far away
as where the haughty Mossynoeci dwelt.

1435The swollen tide threw all the sons of Phrixus,
together with the planks, onto the shore.
The night had been a black one, but the torrents
Zeus had been hurling at them ceased at dawn,
and soon the two groups happened on each other.

1440 (1122)Argus the son of Phrixus called out first:

“Please, in the name of Zeus of Supplication
we beg of you, whoever you might be,
to take us in and help us in our need.
The dire storm winds, you see, roughed up the sea
1445and broke apart the wretched ship on which
we had embarked out of necessity
to carry us across the swell. Therefore,
as suppliants we beg you please be kind
and give us clothes, enough to shield our skin.
1450Please be compassionate and rescue men
like you, your age-mates, who are in distress.
Yes, honor us as guests and suppliants,
since guests and suppliants belong to Zeus,
and he, I hope, is watching over us.”

1455 (1134)Though Jason was suspecting all the while
that Phineus’ words were being fulfilled,
he tactfully inquired in response:

“Yes, we are well-disposed. We shall provide you
with all you need. But tell me where you hail from,
1460what circumstances drove you on this voyage,
and what good names and pedigrees are yours.”

All desperation in his shipwrecked state,
Argus replied:

“Not many years ago
a son of Aeolus named Phrixus traveled
1465from Hellas to Aea—I suspect
you know the tale. He rode a flying ram
(and golden, too, since Hermes gilded it)
the whole way to the city of Aeëtes,
and still today the fleece is lying spread
1470 (1145)across the crown of a luxuriant oak.
The ram, you see, could talk as well and ordered
Phrixus to slaughter it in sacrifice
to Zeus the Exiles’ God, the son of Cronus,
before the other gods. Aeëtes welcomed
1475Phrixus into his court and gave his daughter
Chalciope to him, without the bride-price,
out of the kindness of his heart.

We four

are products of their love. But Phrixus, old
already at the time of his arrival,
1480died at Aeëtes' court. We have resolved
to satisfy our father's dying wish
by sailing to Orchomenus to claim
Athamas' estate. If you would like
to know our names, this here is Cytissorus,
1485 (1155) this is Phrontis, this is Melas here,
and you may call me Argus."

So he told them.

The heroes in delight and wonder greeted
the strangers, and the son of Aeson answered:

"It is as kinsmen on my father's side
1490that you entreat us to relieve your plight:
Cretheus was the brother of Athamas,
and I, the grandson of that Cretheus,
am sailing from the very Greece you speak of
to King Aeëtes' city. We shall talk
1495among ourselves about our kinship later.
Put on some clothing now. I do believe
you were marooned here by some god's design."

So he proclaimed and gave them clothes to wear
out of the *Argo*. Linked in friendship, then,
1500 (1170) they strode to Ares' shrine to slaughter sheep
and offer them in sacrifice. Assembled
before the roofless temple, they assumed
their places round an altar built of fieldstone.
A black stone lay half-buried in the earth
1505within the precinct. It was to this stone
the Amazons had once all prayed. In fact,
whenever they would venture from the mainland,
their laws prevented them from burning oxen
or sheep as sacrifices on this altar;
1510rather, they butchered horses, giant horses
they fattened for a year. Only after
the heroes had performed the sacrifice
and dined upon the feast they had prepared,
did Jason speak among them. He began:

1515 (1179) "Zeus truly must be minding these affairs.
Whether devout or cruel and sacrilegious,
we mortals never can escape his gaze.

Zeus, for example, saved your father Phrixus
from murder at his mad stepmother's hands
1520and gave him boundless wealth besides. So, also,
he brought you safe out of the deadly storm.

Our ship can sail wherever one might wish—
Aea or that rich and holy city
Orchomenus. Athena planned it out
1525and with a bronze ax on the peak of Pelion
felled trees for planks, and Argus built it with her.

Your ship, though, cracked beneath the savage swell
before it even reached the Rocks that run
crashing together in the Pontic strait.
1530 (1192)Come, then, and be our helpers, too: we seek
the golden fleece to bring back home to Hellas.
Come, guide our course. I'm going to atone for
Phrixus' forced escape, which is the reason
Zeus has been angry with the Aeolids."

1535So Jason solaced them. The brothers, though,
cringed upon hearing of the quest. They thought
Aeëtes was unlikely to be gentle
with men that sought to take the fleece from him,
and Argus tried to talk them out of it:

1540"My friends, whatever strength we have to help you
shall never fail to serve your cause. We shall assist you
whenever need arrives. Aeëtes, though,
has fortified himself in dreadful fashion
with savage cruelty, so I greatly doubt
your quest will be successful.

1545 (1203)King Aeëtes
boasts he was born the son of Helius,
and countless tribes of Colchians support him.
The man could rival Ares with his war cry,
muscle, and vigor. Nor would it be easy
1550to steal the fleece without Aeëtes' knowledge.
The dragon standing sentinel before it
is of the worst sort—deathless, never-sleeping.
Mother Earth begot it on the slopes
of the Caucasus, on the Rock of Typhon—
1555you know, where Typhon with his mighty hand grip
climbed up to challenge Zeus. The legends tell us

Cronian Zeus' lightning blasted him
right there atop the jagged peak, and steamy
blood came welling up out of his head.
1560 (1214)He dragged himself, then, wounded, toward
the mountains
and reached the plain of Nysa where he lies
submerged beneath the tide of Lake Serbonis
down to this very day."

So Argus warned them.
When the heroes learned what was before them,
1565terror blanched their cheeks, that is, the cheeks
of all but Peleus. He answered Argus
straight off, with resolution in his voice:

"My friend, don't try to spook us with your talk.
We're not so inexperienced in warcraft
1570that we would fall beneath Aeëtes' arms.
No, we are heading in prepared, I think,
since we are offspring of the blessed gods.
So, if the king will not do us a favor
and offer up the fleece, I doubt his countless
1575 (1225)Colchians will be much assistance to him."

So they conversed awhile among themselves,
then feasted once again and went to sleep.

A breeze was blowing when they rose that morning,
so they set forth, the sail stretched taut before
1580the onrush of the wind, and soon enough
they left the Isle of Ares in their wake.
That night they passed the island of Philyra.
Here, back when Cronus, Ouranos' youngest,
ruled his Titan kin on Mount Olympus
1585(and infant Zeus was in a cave on Crete
tended by the Idaean Curetes),
Cronus went off to meet up with Philyra
behind his consort Rhea's back. When Rhea
caught them in the act of making love,
1590 (1237)he changed himself into a long-maned horse,
kicked himself out of bed, and galloped off.
Philyra, daughter of the Ocean, left
her dear old home and island in disgrace
and settled down among the lofty mountains
1595of the Pelasgians, and there it was

she foaled at length Cheiron: half man, half horse,
product of an extra-species union.

From there they sailed on, skirting the Macrones,
the never-ending land of the Becheiri,
1600the proud Sapeires, even the Byzeri.
So, swept along by favorable winds,
they ever onward cleaved their course. And now
the far end of the Pontic Sea appeared
before their rapid progress. Now arose
1605 (1247)the summits of the sheer Caucasus Mountains
where Prometheus was hung, his limbs
fixed to a rough cliff face by cuffs of bronze.
He served his liver to an eagle daily;
daily the bird returned to rip it out.
1610The heroes spotted outspread wings toward dusk
passing above the masthead near the clouds.
The huge and churning pennons loudly whispered,
puffing the sails. No, this was not a normal
bird of the air, but bigger, and it worked
1615its feathered wings like smoothly polished oars.
They soon discerned Prometheus' anguished
howl as, again, his liver was devoured.
The air was full of shrieks until they saw
the cruel eagle flying from the mountain
back the way that it had come.

1620 (1260)That evening,
under Argus' unfailing guidance,
they reached wide-flowing Phasis and the eastmost
edge of the Pontic Sea. Straightway they struck
the sail and yardarm, stowed them in the hold,
1625and then stepped down the mast and laid it out
beside them. Quickly under oar, they entered
the river's mighty current, and it yielded,
foaming, before them. The sublime Caucasus
and the Cytaean city of Aea
1630were larboard, and to port the plain of Ares
and Ares' sacred orchard, where the dragon
kept constant watch beneath the fleece spread out
across the crown of a luxuriant oak.

And Jason from a golden goblet poured
1635 (1271)honey-sweet offerings of unmixed wine
into the river, asking that the Earth,

the local deities, and all the shades
of the indigenous departed heroes
please be kind, benign, and blameless helpers
1640and warmly welcome *Argo* to their shores.

Ancaeus, then, announced:

“We now have reached
the river Phasis and the land of Colchis.
The time has come to plan among ourselves
whether to ply Aeëtes with persuasion
1645or whether other means will serve us best.”

So he announced. At Argus’ suggestion
Jason told the crew to keep the ship
afloat at anchor after they had reached
a green lagoon inside the river’s mouth,
1650 (1285)and so they spent the night. A few hours later
day broke, the day that they had been expecting.

BOOK 3

Come now, Erato, stand beside me, tell me
how, through the passion of Medea, Jason
returned the fleece to Iolcus. Yes, you, too,
enjoy your share of Cypris' dominion.
5Your magic spellbinds marriageable maidens
with thoughts of love, and that is why, Erato,
Eros is in the lovely name you bear.

We left the heroes hiding in a blind
among some thickly growing reeds. Athena
10and Hera spotted them, despite their cover,
and slipped into a room to plait a plot
apart from Zeus and all the other gods.
Hera was first to ask what should be done:

"Since you are Zeus' daughter, you should be
15 (12)the first to give advice. What should we do?
Can you devise some scheme by which the heroes
strip the golden fleece from King Aeëtes
and bring it back to Hellas? No, he's not
the sort they could persuade with honeyed phrases.
20In fact, that man is such an awful bully
that we should shun no means of thwarting him."

So she confided, and Athena answered:

"Hera, I also have been meditating
upon this matter, but my mind, for all
25the many tactics I have weighed and measured,
has failed to find one that will do the trick."

With that, they fixed their eyes upon the floor
and stood there each in her own world. Hera
first broke the silence to propose a plan:

30 (25)"Come, let us go find Cyprian Aphrodite
and tell her that she must approach her son
and pressure him to sink a shaft into
Aeëtes' daughter, drug-adept Medea,

so that the girl is struck with lust for Jason.
35I am quite certain that, with her assistance,
Jason will bring the fleece back home to Greece.”

So she proposed. The shrewd scheme satisfied
Athena, and she uttered honeyed words:

“Hera, I am as my father made me—
40oblivious to that little fellow’s arrows.
Love charms and all such things are lost upon me.
Still, if you like this plan, I’ll go along . . .
please, though, do all the talking when we see her.”

So spoke she, and they rose and promenaded
45 (36)over to Cypris’ colossal palace
(the one her hobbled husband had constructed
before he led her out of Zeus’ halls).
Once inside the walls, they reached a courtyard
and strode on to the chamber that the goddess
50shared with her man Hephaestus. He himself
had gone at daybreak to his forge and anvils
in a vast cavern on a Floating Island
where he would daily cast with blasts of fire
ingenious miracles of metalwork.
55So, left alone again, the goddess Cypris
was lounging on a couch inlaid with bronze.
Her mane of hair let down and dangling over
either spotless shoulder, she was using
a golden comb to work the tangles out
60 (47)before she wove the tresses into braids.
Soon as she saw the goddesses before her,
she paused and bade them enter. Then she rose,
sat them on couches, sat herself back down,
and tied her hair above her head because
65there still was brushing to be done. All smiles,
she greeted them with pointed deference:

“Dear ladies, welcome! Why, what pressing purpose
could bring such reverend matrons to my home?
What has come over you? Before today
70you never over-often deigned to pay me
such honor, since you move in higher spheres.”

Hera retorted then: “You mock us, dear.

But, seriously now, we face a matter
of life or death. Already Aeson's son
75 (58) and all who follow questing for the fleece
at anchor ride beside the banks of Phasis.
Now that the crucial moment is at hand,
we're worried to distraction for them all,
but most for Jason. Though he chart a course
80 far off to Hades' palace to release
Ixion from his bondage, all my strength,
so long as strength remains, shall go to guard him.
Nor shall I suffer Pelias to shirk
a well-earned death and live to laugh at me.
85 Rash fool! To fail to pay my shrines their due!

But it was well before that king's neglect
that Jason proved his worth and won my favor:
when the Anauros crested, chest-high, over
the ford, he strode up glistening from the hunt,
90 (69) and I was out inspecting men's behavior.
Snowy, the mountain summits shone; runoff
through channel and ravine rolled rushing, swirling,
tumbling down. He pitied at the crossing
the weathered flesh I wore as a disguise.
95 Once I was muscled up onto his back,
he shouldered me across the heaving rapids—
hence my unquenchable esteem for him.
But Pelias will not be forced to pay
for his atrocities unless you, dear,
100 contrive safe passage for the son of Aeson."

The queen had spoken. Cypris for a time
sat dumbstruck at the sight of Hera begging.
When she replied, she spoke in humbler guise:

"Queen, nothing would be more depraved than I,
105 (80) if I make light of your appeal, denying
helpful suggestion or whatever labor
impotent hands could work on your behalf.
Nor do I ask a favor in return."

So Cypris spoke, and Hera in her turn
110 uttered a calculated repartee:

"We've not come for your brawn or broadsword, dear.

All you must do is tell your son to spark
passion for Jason in Aeëtes' daughter.
For if she takes an interest in the man,
115she cherishes his cause and, when she does,
our hero will with trifling labor seize
the golden fleece and coast back home to Iolcus—
trust me, that girl was simply made for guile.”

So Hera spoke her mind, and Cypris voiced
120 (90)the following reply to both of them:

“But ladies, listen, little Eros sooner
would heed your will than mine. Brash as he is,
his eyes might show some glimmer of respect
before such stately figures as yourselves.
125My discipline means nothing to him. Always
willful and wild, he cackles when I chide him.
Why, sick of all his antics, I once threatened,
in view of all the gods, to snap in half
his dismal-whizzing darts and short bow, too.
130Only wound up the more, the little monster
menaced me thus: *If you don't keep your mitts
far from my darts and let me get my way,
you might regret, Mommy, what you have done.*”

So she lamented. Hera and Athena
135 (101)smiled and bandied glances back and forth,
so she exclaimed again in agitation:

“Yes, yes, the whole world titters at my troubles.
I shouldn't publish them to all and sundry.
My private misery already more than
140suffices. All the same, because you both
have taken such an interest in the matter,
I shall sound him out, speak sweetly to him,
and never take his back talk for an answer.”

So Cypris promised them, and Hera squeezed
145her slender hand and spoke the final word:

“Accomplish now, forthwith, what we require
just as we said and just as you have promised.
And, dear, don't pout so, squabbling with your boy—
he will be all grown up before you know it.”

150 (111)She rose and, with Athena at her heels,
paraded back up to her husband's palace.
Cypris in turn wound around Mount Olympus,
searching the valleys for her wayward son.

The garden was blooming, and she found him there,
155but not alone; there, too, was Ganymede
whose bloom had moved the king of gods to make
a home for him in heaven among the immortals.
Cozy as neighbor boys, they played at dice
(there even dice are golden). Little Eros
160stood clutching greedily against his breast
fists full of winnings. An impassioned flush
seethed on his cheeks. His playmate, though, sat silent
and grimaced as he sent his two last dice
tumbling, one by one, into the dirt.
165 (124)Ganymede frowned, Love cackled, and indeed
the last were lost as quickly as the rest.
The loser stalked off, cleaned out, empty-fisted,
failing to notice Cypris on the path.
She strode across the playground, chucked her son
170under the chin and gently scolded him:

“Mischievous little imp, why are you smirking?
Have you been bad and tricked a toddler? Well,
if you are good and do what Mommy says,
she has a treat for you. A nice bright ball!
175All striped and shiny! Once upon a time
Zeus was a baby in a cave on Ida
and liked to play, so Adrasteia, his nanny,
made him this pretty toy. Handy Hephaestus
himself could not devise a finer plaything:

180 (137)Golden circlets hold the whole together.
Parallel hoops are sewn slantwise around them
to cinch them tight, and blue streaks round these hoops
in spirals wind and wander, hiding all
the seams and stitches. Toss it up, a train
185trails after, glittering like a comet's tail—

this will be your reward, but not before
you shoot Medea full of love for Jason.
Now go and do the deed; don't drag your feet,
for Mommy's kindness, later, may be less.”

190 So spoke she, and the words fell welcome on
his eager ears. Scattering dice before him,
he ran to hang upon his mother's skirts
with clenched fists and demanded his reward:
Now, Mommy, no, right now! To soothe the fit,
195 (150) she pinched his cheeks and kissed him, hugged him
close,
and, smirking, promised:

“Let your head and mine
attest the bargain: I shall not deceive you.
There—I have sworn. Now, if you want the toy,
go sink a shaft deep in Aeëtes' daughter.”

200 So spoke she, and the god snatched up the dice,
reckoned the sum, and stuffed his mother's pockets
full of them. Then he ran and grabbed his quiver
from where it leaned, ready, against a tree,
slung it about him with a strap of gold,
205 and gathered up his crooked little bow.

Brilliant around him bloomed the garden of Zeus,
the groves and orchards, but the boy rushed on,
flew through the gates of high Olympus.

Thence

opens the downward path; there double peaks
210 (162) like pillars of the earth vault ever upward
to keep the sky from falling; there the sun,
first upon rising in the morning, ruddies
the summits with extended beam. As Eros
was coasting unobstructed through the air,
215 plump tilth and bustling towns and nymph-abounding
waterways passed into his view and then
strange ridges and a rounded swatch of sea.

The heroes, though, remained apart, concealed
among the river rushes, strategizing.

220 Jason was speaking, and the men were seated
in order bench by bench, in silence, listening:

“Comrades, the plan I now shall lay before you
strikes me as wisest. Yours will be the task
of bringing it to pass. Our need is shared,
225 (174) and counsel, too, is shared among us all.
The man who locks his thoughts and wisdom up

in reticence should know that he alone
is keeping all of us from heading home.

While you remain at ease but under arms
230here on the *Argo*, I shall make my way
to King Aeëtes' palace—I myself,
the sons of Phrixus, and two other men.
Once I am granted audience, I shall test him
with words to find out whether he is willing
235to give the golden fleece up out of friendship
or whether he will balk, trust in his strength,
and block our quest. Thus we can sound the depth
of our distress and next consider whether
the implements of war will serve us better
240 (185)or double-dealing, if we rule out war.
We shouldn't simply take the man's possession
until we have at least assessed his mind.
Surely it's wiser to approach him first
and try to win him over with entreaties.
245In rough spots words have often smoothed the way
and won what valor only could have won
with toil and sweat.

Consider this: Aeëtes
once welcomed worthy Phrixus when the latter
was running from his stepmother's deceit
250and slaughter at his father's hands. All men,
even the most contemptuous of them,
dread and revere the covenants of Zeus
the God of Guest and Host."

So Jason spoke,
and all the heroes rushed to voice approval.
255 (195)No one proposed a different course, so Jason
bade Telamon, Augeas, and the sons
of Phrixus join him in his embassy
and took the staff of Hermes in his hand.

They wasted no time disembarking over
260the rushes where the upward sloping bank
afforded solid ground. This tract is known
as Circe's Plain, and tamarisks and willows
grow there in rows, and corpses wrapped in cables
dangle earthward from the overstory.
265Down to this very day it is taboo
among the Colchians to cremate males

upon their death. Nor does their faith allow them
to lay the bodies in the earth and heap
barrows above them. Rather, they are shrouded
270 (207) in uncured hide and dangled from the treetops
outside the city. Still, the earth receives
as many corpses as the air because
their females' bodies are, in fact, interred.
Such are the equitable customs there.

275 Hera helped the heroes travel safely
by casting thick mist down around the city
so that they would escape the notice of
the multitudinous throngs of Colchians.
Soon as the heroes passed out of the plain
280 into the town and palace, Hera scattered
the cloud away. They stood there in the entry
marveling at the royal court—the wide
gateways, the columns standing, rank on rank,
along the walls, and, higher up, the bronze
285 (218) capitals holding up a marble cornice.

They softly crossed the threshold. All around them
high-climbing vines, prolific strands of leaves,
had broken into bloom. Beneath them bubbled
four ever-flowing springs for which Hephaestus
290 himself had dug the channels. One was flowing
with milk, and one with wine, a third contained
a stream of fragrant oil, and the fourth
was limpid water that, they say, ran hot
after the setting of the Pleiades
295 but at their rising jetted chill as crystal
out of the hollow rock. Such were the wonders
Hephaestus fashioned for Aeëtes' palace
at Cyta.

He had forged for him as well
bronze-footed bulls with brazen mouths that breathed
300 (231) shocking, abominable blasts of flame.
What's more, he made an indestructible plow
out of a single block of adamant
to pay a favor back to Helios
who had picked up Hephaestus in his war car
305 when he was faint from waging war at Phlegra.

A central iron door was built there, too.

Beyond it many sturdy double doors
and living chambers ran in both directions.
Along each side a fine arcade extended,
310 and crosswise to them in the wings loftier
apartments stood. In one of them, the highest,
Aeëtes slept beside his wife. Absyrtus,
his son, inhabited another of them.
Asterodeia, a Caucasian nymph,
315 (243) bore him before Aeëtes wed Eidyia,
Tethys' and Ocean's youngest daughter.
The Colchians, however, took to calling
Absyrtus "Phaëthon" (the Shining One)
since he outshone the other boys his age.
320 In other lower rooms, Aeëtes' daughters
Medea and Chalcioppe resided,
along with all their maids.

It was Medea
that Jason and his party met by chance
when they were wandering from room to room
325 to find Chalcioppe. Hera had made
Medea stay at home that day on purpose.
The girl, you see, was rarely at the palace
but usually working all day long
as priestess at the shrine of Hecate.

330 (253) Soon as the maiden saw that men were coming,
she shrieked. Chalcioppe could not but hear it,
and when her handmaids dropped their wool and spindles
and rushed out all together in a crowd,
she went as well and, when she saw her sons,
335 flung out her hands for joy. Her sons as well
flung out their hands for joy at seeing her
and hugged her warmly. Sobbing, she exclaimed:

"So, you were not, in fact, about to leave me
so thoughtlessly and travel far away.
340 Fate has returned you. How distraught I was!
A wild and senseless lust to sail to Greece
had taken hold of you, a dire delusion,
all at your father Phrixus' behest.
His dying proclamation to you tortured
345 (265) my heart with netherworldly afflictions.
Why risk a voyage to the place they call
Orchomenus, whatever that might be,

to claim some King Athamas' estate?
Why leave me here to bear my grief alone?"

350 So she lamented. Last of all, Aeëtes
emerged from his apartment with the queen,
Eidyia, when they heard Chalciope.
A bustle filled the court, the sounds of servants—
some of them readying a massive bull
355 for slaughter, some with brazen axes splitting
wood for the fire, and others boiling water
for baths before the feast. Not one of them
was stinting in his service to the king.

And Eros was descending all the while,
360 (276) descending through the lustrous air, unseen
but as rambunctious as the stinging fly
that oxherds call the "goad," the kind that nettles
heifers. In an instant he was there,
bracing his back against the antechamber's
365 doorpost. He deftly strung his little bow
and from the quiver chose a virgin arrow
laden with future groans. His speedy feet
whisked him across the threshold, he himself
unnoticed as he keenly scanned the scene.
370 Then, crouching low beneath the son of Aeson,
he nocked the arrow midway up the string,
and, parting bow and string with both hands, shot
Medea. Sudden muteness gripped her spirit.
The god, then, fluttered from the high-roofed hall,
375 (286) cackling, and the arrow burned like fire
deep, deep down beneath the maiden's heart.
She fired scintillating glances over
and over at the son of Aeson. Anguish
quickenened her heart and panted in her breast,
380 and she could think of him, him only, nothing
but him, as sweet affliction drained her soul.

As when a workwoman, a hireling drudge
whose livelihood is spinning yarn from wool,
piles kindling around a burning brand
385 so that there might be light beneath the roof
at night, since she has woken very early,
and from that one small brand a fire spreads
marvelously and eats up all the twigs,

so all-consuming Eros curled around
390 (296) Medea's heart and blazed there secretly.
Her tender cheeks kept turning pale, then crimson,
pale, then crimson, in her mind's confusion.

After the slaves had laid the banquet out,
and all the guests had washed off their exhaustion
395 in nice warm baths, they satisfied their hearts
with meat and drink. Soon, though, Aeëtes questioned
his daughter's sons, addressing them just so:

"Sons of my daughter, offspring of that Phrixus
I honored more than any other guest
400 who lived at court, how has it come about
that you have made your way back to Aea?
Did some misfortune cut your voyage short?
No, no, you wouldn't listen when I warned you
about the endless distance of the journey.
405 (309) I saw the whole route once while flying in
my father Helios' chariot.
We were resettling my sister Circe
way out west and flew a great long while
before we stopped at the Tyrrhenian coast
410 where she is living to this day, far, far
from Colchis. But what joy is there in stories?
Come, tell me what misfortune spoiled your trip,
who are these men attending you, and where
you beached your hollow ship on disembarking."

415 So he demanded. Argus answered first,
before his brothers, since he was the eldest
and most intent on aiding Jason's quest:

"Furious storms, Aeëtes, quickly splintered
our ship and, as we huddled on the wreckage,
420 (322) a roller rose out of the night and swept us
ashore upon the Isle of Enyalios.
Clearly some god was guarding us, because
we never ran into the birds of Ares,
the ones that used to make that rock their home.
425 These men, you see, had scared the birds away
when they had disembarked the day before.
It must have been the will of Zeus, or Fate,
that pitied us and sent these men to save us.

As soon as they had heard the famous name
430 of Phrixus (and your name as well), they gave us
clothes and provisions, more than we required.
You see, they had been sailing to your city.
If you would like to know their journey's purpose,
it's not a mystery:

A certain king
435 (334) passionately desired to drive this fellow
far from his homeland and estate because
he far surpassed all Aeolus' offspring
in battle prowess. So the king dispatched him
on an adventure, an impossible quest.
440 This king maintains the heirs of Aeolus
will not escape the heart-confounding grudge
and punishment of unrelenting Zeus,
nor Phrixus' insufferable sentence
and curse on them, until the fleece at last
returns to Greece.

445 Pallas Athena built
their ship, a ship unlike the vessels found
among the Colchians. I swear, we happened
to take the worst of these—the churning sea
and gale winds quickly battered it to pieces.
450 (343) Their tight-knit ship, however, holds together,
even though every gale at once should storm her.
She runs with equal speed both under sail
and when the oarsmen with persistent strokes
muscle her onward. Here's the man who gathered
455 the mightiest warriors in Greece aboard her
and set out for your city. He has traveled
through many cities and unfathomed seas,
confident you will give the fleece to him.

Their quest will turn out just as you decide
460 because this man has not arrived among us
with outrage in his hands, but eager, rather,
to offer fitting payment for the gift—
he heard from me about the Sauromatae,
your fiercest rivals, and would gladly force them
under your scepter.

465 (354) If you wish to know
their names and pedigrees, I shall be happy
to tell you them. This fellow here, the one
for whom the others gathered out of Hellas,

is known as Jason, son of Aeson, son
470 of Cretheus. And if he is indeed
of Cretheus' stock, he would be kinsman
to us on our father's side because
Cretheus and Athamas both were sons
of Aeolus, and Phrixus was the son
475 of Aeolid Athamas. Surely, king,
you've heard of Helius' son Augeas—
he's standing here—and this here's Telamon,
the son of famed Aeacus, son of Zeus.
Likewise the others traveling with them
480 (366) are all the sons or grandsons of immortals.”

So Argus sought to win Aeëtes over.
The king, however, when he heard this speech,
boiled with wrath. His heart shot up in anger.
He raged widely, but most against the sons of
485 Chalciope, because he thought they'd guided
the strangers there on purpose. In his fury
his eyes were flashing underneath his brows:

“Get from my sight, you scoundrels, right this minute!
Pack up your tricks and get out of my land
490 before someone starts ogling the fleece
and visits Phrixus in the Underworld!

I greatly doubt you fellows leagued together
and sailed from Hellas to retrieve the fleece—
no, you desire my realm and royal scepter.
495 (377) If you had not first tasted of my table,
rest assured, I would have cut your tongues out,
lopped your hands off and dispatched you homeward
wearing your feet alone, so that you never
come back a second time. What blasphemy
500 you have pronounced against the blessed gods!”

Thus King Aeëtes raged and so incensed
Telamon's spirit that the latter burned
to utter deadly insults in reply.
Jason, however, cut him off by speaking
505 gentle words before the curses flew:

“Aeëtes, I beseech you, please be lenient
toward this expedition. By no means

are we here visiting your court in Cyta
with the intentions you impute to us.
510 (389)What man would hazard of his own free will
voyaging over such high-swelling seas
to steal another man's possession? Fate,
rather, and an abominable tyrant's
heartless insistence have compelled this visit.

515Bestow a favor on your suppliants,
and I shall speak of you as of a god
throughout the land of Hellas. Furthermore,
we are prepared to pay immediate
indemnity in battle, whether you
520might wish us to subdue beneath your scepter
the Sauromatae or some other tribe."

So he proposed, with soft persuasion aiming
to sway Aeëtes. But the king was mulling
divided purposes within his chest:
525 (398)whether to charge and slay them then and there
or test their mettle first. The latter course
seemed better in the end, and he responded:

"Stranger, why should you tell your whole tale through?
If you were truly sired by deities
530and have arrived no weaker than I am
in strength for my possession, I shall give you
the fleece to carry home, if that's your wish,
but only if you pass my test. By no means
am I tightfisted with distinguished men,
535not like that king in Greece you told me of.
The contest will be one of strength and mettle,
one I myself perform with my own hands,
life-threatening though it be.

I am the owner
of two bronze-footed oxen. As they graze
540 (410)the plain of Ares, fire rather often
shoots from their mouths. Once I have yoked their necks,
I drive them over all four stubborn acres
of Ares' fallows. Yes, I cleave the plain
from end to end up to the riverbank,
545casting into the furrows all the while
not seed to summon up Demeter's grain,
but fangs instead, fangs from a wondrous serpent.

They sprout up in the shape of armed and armored
soldiers and, when they charge in all around me,
550I harvest them at once beneath my spear.
I yoke the bulls at daybreak and at dusk
rest from the reaping.

On the very day
that you complete these tasks as I do, you
may take the fleece back to that king of yours.
555 (420)Until you do, though, you should not expect
I will bestow the golden prize upon you.
It's unbecoming for a gentleman
to yield to a man of lesser birth."

Such was his challenge. Jason fixed his eyes
560before his feet in silence and remained
speechless and lost in the predicament.
He sat a long time wondering what to do,
but there was no way to accept the labor
with confidence—it seemed impossible.
565He came out, in the end, with wary words:

"Aeëtes, your demand, though justified,
leaves me no choice, it seems. Therefore I, too,
shall risk the contest, daunting though it be,
and though it be my doom to die of it.
570 (430)Nothing harder can befall a man
than dire necessity. Necessity
has driven me to you—a king's insistence."

So Jason answered, stricken with despair.
Seeing that he was paralyzed, Aeëtes
575dismissed him with a still more heinous threat:

"Go now with your companions, since you are
so keen to try. But if you balk at yoking
the bulls or harvesting the deadly crop,
the consequences I have outlined here
580will then befall you, so that in the future
base men will shrink from troubling their betters."

Such was his bluntness. Jason left his couch,
and Telamon arose, and then Augeas.
But, of the sons of Phrixus, only Argus
585 (441)departed with their party—he had signaled

his brothers to remain behind at home.
They all strode from the hall, and Jason shone
brilliantly in his grace and beauty, gorgeous
above the others, and the maiden fixed
590her eyes, sidelong, on him, appraising him
obliquely from behind her veil. Her heart
was smoldering in its distress. Her soul,
like a pursuing dream, went fluttering
about his footsteps as he walked. And so,
595in great dismay, the heroes left the palace.

On guard against the anger of Aeëtes,
Chalciope retreated with her sons
swiftly into her room. Medea followed,
her heart obsessing over all the worries
600 (453)love excites. The vision still appeared
before her eyes: what he himself was like,
what clothing he had worn, what he had said,
how he had sat upon his chair, and how
walked out the door. When she considered him,
605she thought that she had never seen his equal.
His voice and luscious phrases sounded over
and over in her ears. She feared for him—
the oxen or invincible Aeëtes
would slay him, and she grieved and grieved as though
610he were already dead. At her bereavement
round tears of earnest pity wet her cheeks.
So she was softly sobbing when she mourned:

“Why has this woe assailed me? I am ruined.
Whether he be the greatest of the heroes
615 (465)who now is doomed to perish, or the weakest,
let him meet his fate. I would prefer, though,
that he escape uninjured. Hecate,
daughter of Perses, Holy Queen of Dread,
please help him to survive and sail for home.
620But if his fate requires that he die
beneath the oxen, let him first know this—
his sad misfortune gives me no delight.”

Such were the love cares torturing her heart.

While Argus and the heroes were proceeding
625out of the city and its press of people

down the road they took in from the plain,
Argus offered Jason a suggestion:

“Son of Aeson, you may scorn the counsel
that I will give you now but, all the same,
630 (476)though you are in a bind, it is unseemly
to shirk the trial. You have already heard me
talking about a girl, a witch who learned
black arts from Perses’ daughter Hecate.
If we can find a way to win her over,
635you need no longer fear Aeëtes’ trial
will end with your demise. I am afraid, though,
very afraid, my mother will refuse
to help us in this matter. All the same,
I shall return and plead our case to her
640because the same doom hangs above us all.”

Thus in a friendly fashion he proposed,
and Jason said:

“Dear comrade, if this plan
seems prudent to you, I do not oppose it.
Go and beseech your mother, beg for help
645 (487)with carefully selected words. But, mind you,
if we entrust our homecoming to women,
our hopes are very pitiful indeed.”

So he responded, and they quickly reached
the river marsh. Their comrades in excitement
650shouted out questions when they saw them coming,
but Jason gave a sorrowful response:

“My friends, inflexible Aeëtes wildly
rages against us in his heart of hearts.
No need for me to tell you all the details;
655no need for you to question me about them.
In sum, he spoke of two bronze-footed bulls
that graze the plain of Ares, how they shoot
fire out of their mouths. He challenged me
to plow four fallow acres with the things.
660 (498)He will provide, he said, the following seed:
fangs from a serpent’s jaws, and from these fangs
armed men, earth-nurtured soldiers, will emerge.
The very hour they sprout I must destroy them.
Since I could not come up with something better,

665I vowed to take the challenge on myself.”

So he explained. The contest seemed a labor
none could accomplish, so they stood awhile
unspeaking, silent, eying one another.

Thoughts of catastrophe and then despair
670oppressed them. Then at long last Peleus
spoke words of inspiration to his comrades:

“It’s time to make a plan, though there is less
profit in talk, I think, than our own strength.

Heroic son of Aeson, if you truly

675 (508)*do* intend to yoke the bulls, that is,

if you are passionate to win the contest,
keep your word and gird yourself for action.

But if your heart does not have perfect faith
in your ability, do not, yourself,

680attempt it nor sit swiveling your eyes

in search of someone else to do the labor,

since I am not the sort that runs and hides.

The worst that I can suffer will be death.”

So Peleus proclaimed, and Telamon

685was moved as well to stand as a contestant.

The third to rise was haughty Idas, then

Tyndareus’ sons stood up beside him

and, finally, the son of Oeneus,

who made the cut of foremost fighters, though

690 (519)the down had not yet flowered on his cheeks,

because so great a battle lust inspired him.

The other men deferred to them in silence.

Argus, however, quickly spoke his mind

to all those who were keen to try the contest:

695“Friends, yours would be an act of desperation.

It’s likely that my mother will provide

crucial support, so, eager as you are,

remain here on the ship a little longer

just as before, since holding back is better

700than rashly snatching up a dreadful doom.

There is a girl, a maiden. King Aeëtes

raised her here at court, and Hecate

has taught her to prepare with perfect skill

all the magic herbs that earth and water
705 (531)nurture to growth. Armed with these tinctures, she
can blunt the fury of relentless fire,
check suddenly a roaring river's spate,
pause stars, and halt the holy moon's advance.
As we were coming back along the road
710out of the court, I thought of her and thought
to ask my mother to persuade this girl,
her sister, to assist us in the contest.
If all of you agree to my proposal,
I shall return to King Aeëtes' palace
715this very day and see what I can do.
With god's assistance my attempt will prosper."

So he submitted, and the gods provided
a sign to show their will: a timid dove
that happened to be fleeing from a hawk
720 (542)dropped, in confusion, into Jason's lap,
and its assailant then impaled itself
upon the splintered stern post. Mopsus swiftly
interpreted the omen for his comrades:

"My friends, this auspice has appeared for you
725with god's approval. There's no better way
to read the sign than that we should approach
the girl and win her over with persuasion.
She won't refuse, I think, if Phineus
has rightly prophesied that our return
730lies with the goddess Cypris, since it was
her gentle bird that just escaped its doom.
And as the heart within me reads this omen,
so may it now be brought to pass. Come, friends,
first call on Cytherea to protect us,
735 (554)then go and act on Argus' proposal."

So he interpreted, and all the heroes
took thought of Phineus' prophecy
and shouted in approval. Only Idas
the son of Aphareus started up
740and grumbled an abominable reproach:

"My, my, have we come here as fellow crewmen
to women, now that we are asking Cypris
for help and not the mighty Enyalios?"

Look at you—ogling hawks and doves and shirking
745heroic labors. On your way, then, boys.
Neglect the work of soldiers; go and woo
fainthearted maidens over to our cause.”

So growled he in a huff. Though many heroes
murmured words of muted disapproval,
750 (565)none of them spoke against him, so he gruffly
sat down again, and Jason spoke his mind
to the assembly, rousing them to action:

“Now, since everyone agrees, let Argus
head to the palace. We ourselves should loosen
755our cables from the riverbank and fix them
openly to the mainland. Lurking here
like coward ne’er-do-wells is unbecoming.”

So he commanded and at once dispatched
Argus at full speed back toward town again
760while all the others heeded Jason’s orders,
weighed the anchor stone, and rowed the ship
ashore a short ways from the river flats.

Aeëtes, meanwhile, had convened the Colchians
far from the palace at the council place
765 (577)where they had often met, and they were planning
atrocious schemes and torments for the Minyans.
Aeëtes vowed that, once the bulls had ravaged
the man who had agreed to undergo
the lethal labor, he would fell the oaks
770atop the wooded banks and torch the ship
and all the men aboard it, so that they
might scream away their wicked insolence,
and all their wanton scheming come to nothing.

He never would have welcomed to his hearth
775Phrixus the son of Aeolus, despite
the fact that he surpassed all other guests
in piety and kindness, and despite
his desperate need, had Zeus himself not sent
Hermes from heaven as a messenger
780 (588)to make sure Phrixus found his host receptive.

So much the less, then, would the band of pirates

who had descended on his land abide there,
uninjured, long. Their only interest
was laying hands on other people's goods,
785hatching dishonest plots, and plundering
the herdsmen's steadings in tumultuous raids.

He added that, beyond these penalties,
the sons of Phrixus personally should pay him
fitting indemnities for bringing home
790impetuous marauders who were plotting
to drive him from his throne and royal power.
In fact, his father Helius had once
uttered a baleful prophecy that warned him
to be on guard against clandestine plots
795 (601)and treachery within his family—
that was the reason he had sent the boys
out of the way to Hellas, though the trip
was what they wanted and their father's bidding.
He knew his daughters never could devise
800infernal schemes, nor could his son Absyrtus.
No, he assumed Chalciopé's sons only
would bring the prophecy to its fulfillment.

So in his rage he spoke of horrid deeds
among his subjects and with mighty threats
805warned them to watch the ship and heroes closely
and make sure none of them escaped destruction.

Argus, meanwhile, had reached Aeëtes' palace
and with resourceful pleading urged his mother
to ask the girl for help. Chalciopé
810 (612)had thought of this already, but a fear
had gripped her heart, a fear that fate would stop her
or her appeals would come to naught because
the girl would dread their father's deadly anger
or, even if the girl agreed to help them,
815their plan would be discovered and forestalled.

The girl herself was lying on her bed.
Deep sleep at first relieved her of her torment,
but soon beguiling, violent dreams assailed her,
as often happens with an anxious girl.

820She dreamed the stranger undertook the trial

not from a need to bring the fleece to Hellas,
no, that was not why he had visited
Aeëtes' palace; rather, he had come
to take her back home as his wedded wife.
825 (623)She dreamed that she herself had undertaken
the contest and performed the tasks with ease,
but that her parents backed out of the promise
since they had set the labor of the yoking
not for their daughter but the visitor
830alone. And then a two-edged quarrel broke out
between her father and the visitors.
Both sides submitted to her arbitration
and bade her side with whom her heart preferred.
Straight off she chose the stranger and ignored
835her parents. Infinite resentment gripped them.
They howled in rage and at their howling sleep
released her. She awoke in shock and shivered,
her wild eyes swiveling from wall to wall
around the room. She strained to pull her spirit
840 (635)back down inside herself and said aloud:

“Oh, how these baneful dreams have frightened me.
I fear the coming of these heroes means
catastrophe. My thoughts keep fluttering
around that stranger. Let him go and woo
845a Greek girl far away among his people.
Maidenhood and the palace of my parents
should be my lone concerns. And yet, my heart
made shameless as a bitch's, I no longer
shall stand aside but go feel out my sister
850to see if she entreats me to assist
the trial, because she hopes to save her sons.
Yes, that would quell my heart's rebellious anguish.”

So she resolved, then rose and left the chamber,
barefoot and covered only by a nightgown.
855 (646)She was desperate to see her sister,
yet, when she crossed the threshold of the courtyard,
she lingered for a spell before her chamber,
checked by shame. She turned around, returned,
then stepped outside again, and then again
860shrank back inside. Her feet conveyed her here,
there, nowhere, since, whenever she emerged,
the shame within her turned her steps around.

Whenever shame, though, turned her steps around,
fierce longing turned her back and urged her onward.
865 Three times she started and she stopped three times.
The fourth time, though, she whirled about, then tumbled
headlong onto her bed.

Think of a girl,
a bride, bewailing in the marriage chamber
the absence of the blooming youth on whom
870 (658) her parents and her brothers had bestowed her—
how, out of shame and shyness, she does not
make conversation with his household's servants
but sits apart in grief. Some death has claimed him
before, as man and wife, they had the pleasure
875 of one another's charms. Her heart on fire,
she looks upon her freshly widowed bed
and sobs in silence, worrying that women
will mock and scorn her. So Medea wept.

Just then it chanced that, while she was lamenting,
880 one of the servants who attended her
approached and noticed her and right away
bustled next door to tell Chalciope,
who happened to be with her sons, debating
how she might win her sister to their cause.
885 (669) Though busy planning, she did not ignore
the serving woman's unexpected news
but rushed in wonder straight out of her chamber
into the chamber where Medea lay
distraught, with two fresh scratches on her cheeks.
890 Chalciope could see her sister's eyes
were dim with weeping, so she started thus:

"Dear, dear Medea, why are you in tears?
What's wrong? What heavy grief has crushed your heart?
What, has some heaven-sent affliction wrapped
895 its coils around your body? Have you heard
some dire threat that father has pronounced
against my sons and me? If only I
were not now looking on our parents' palace
or even on this city but were living
900 (680) off at the world's outskirts where the word
'Colchian' never, ever has been spoken."

So she exclaimed. The maiden's cheeks turned red,

and for a long time virgin modesty
restrained her, though she ached to tell her tale.
905At one time words were rising to her tongue's tip
and at another sinking in her breast.
Time and again they reached her shapely lips
and strained to blossom forth, but no sound came.
When she at last could speak, she lied, because
910the stubborn love gods still were pressing on her:

"Chalciope, my heart is all atremble
over your sons. I fear our father shortly
will cut them down together with the strangers.
Sleeping just now a fitful sleep, I saw
915 (691)such ghastly nightmares. May a god make sure
they never come to pass. Yes, may you never
endure hard sorrow for your children's sake."

So she exclaimed to find out if her sister
would come out with a plea to save her sons.
920The story overwhelmed Chalciope
with terror past all bearing. She disclosed:

"I, too, was worrying about this matter
and came to see if you, perhaps, might work
together with me to devise a plan.
925First, you must swear by Heaven and Earth to seal
whatever I reveal inside your heart
and thus be my accomplice. In the names
of all the blessed gods, in your own name,
and those of father and mother, I implore you
930 (702)not to sit by and watch an evil doom
viciously cut my children down or else,
when I have died beside my darling sons,
I shall return hereafter out of Hades
as an avenging Fury to torment you."

935So she threatened, and a flood of tears
burst forth when she had finished. Then she knelt
and gripped Medea's knees with both her arms
and laid her head upon her sister's lap.
Each of them poured out piteous lamentation
940over the other, and the sound of wailing
echoed faintly through the court. Grief-stricken
Medea was the first to speak again:

“How can I help you, sister, when you threaten
Furies and baneful curses? All I want is
945 (713)to save your sons. I summon as my witness
the potent oath code of the Colchians
by which you have insisted that I swear.
I call as well on mighty Heaven and Earth,
the mother of the gods, to witness that,
950as much as there is strength within my body,
you never shall be lacking in support,
provided what you ask is possible.”

So vowed Medea, and her sister asked:

“To save my sons, Medea, could you please
955conjure some trick to help the stranger win
the contest? He is desperate as well.
Argus, in fact, has just now come from him
and asked that I attempt to win your aid.
When I came out, I left him in my chamber.”

960 (724)So she explained. The heart within Medea
leapt up for joy. Her lovely cheeks went flush.
She melted with delight. A mist descended
over her liquid eyes, and she replied:

“Sister, I shall provide whatever aid
965you and your sons would find most beneficial.
Never may dawn again light up my eyes,
nor may my mouth take in another breath,
if I place anything above your life
and that of all your sons. They are my brothers,
970my dear protectors and my playmates. Yes,
I tell you that I am a sister to you
and daughter also, equal with your sons,
because you nursed me at your breast when I
was but an infant, as I’ve heard my mother
many times declare.

975 (736)Go now, but bury
all that I shall perform for you in silence,
so that I can do what I must do
without my parents finding out. At daybreak
I shall be at the shrine of Hecate
980with drugs to beat the bulls and so assist
the stranger who has started all this trouble.”

With that, her sister strode out of the chamber
to tell her sons about Medea's plan.
Shame, though, and hateful terror gripped the maiden
985when she was left alone. To help a stranger
by weaving schemes behind her father's back!

Now night was covering the earth in darkness,
and sailors from their ships were studying
the stars of Ursa Major and Orion.
990 (746)Travelers and watchmen turned their thoughts
toward sleep,
and deep, deep slumber was relieving even
those mothers who had lately lost their children.
No dogs were barking in the streets; no voices
echoed; silence held the blackening gloom.
995Sweet sleep, however, never eased Medea—
no, worry and her love for Jason roused her.
She feared the bulls, the overwhelming force
beneath which he was all but sure to suffer
shameful destruction on the field of Ares.

1000Her heart was fitful, restless in the way
a sunbeam, when reflected off the water
swirling out of a pail or pitcher, dances
upon the walls—yes, that was how her heart
was quivering. And tears of pity flowed
1005 (759)out of her eyes, and anguish burned her insides
by smoldering into her skin and sinews,
even into the apex of her spine,
the point where torment peaks when the relentless
love gods have filled us up with agony.

1010Sometimes she said, yes, she would offer him
the magic drug to charm the bulls; at others,
no, she would not and she would kill herself;
at others, she would neither take her life
nor offer him the magic, but remain
1015just as she had been, suffering, in silence.

She sat down then and, wavering, exclaimed:

“Which of these woes am I to choose? My mind
is reeling. There's no respite from the pain.
It burns and burns. It burns. I wish the arrows

1020 (774) of Artemis had struck me dead before
I saw that man, yes, long before the sons of
Chalciope had ever left for Greece.
Some god, some Fury shipped pains overflowing
with grief from there to here, right here, to me.
1025 Let Jason perish in the competition,
if he is doomed to perish. If I gave him
the drug, how could my parents fail to learn
what I had done? What reason could I give them?
What lie or ploy would be of any use?

1030 If I see him alone, without his friends,
will I acknowledge him? My lot is cruel.
I cannot hope that, even when he dies,
I will be free from anguish. He will be
a curse on me when he has lost his life.
1035 (786) So good-bye, modesty. Good-bye, fair name.
Once I have saved him, let him go unharmed
wherever he desires while I, the day
that he completes the contest, leave this life
by dangling my body from a rafter
1040 or taking drugs, the kind that kill the heart . . .

but, when I'm dead, they all will stand there eyeing
my ruin. The entire town will pass
around the story of my fall, and all
the Colchian girls will bear me on their lips
1045 everywhere, harshly savaging my name:

She loved that foreigner so much it killed her.

*By giving way to lust, she has disgraced
her house and home.*

What shame will not be mine?

Ah, mad obsession! No, it would be better
1050 (799) to take my life here in my room tonight
and by an inexplicable demise
escape such dreadful infamy before
I do this shameful and outrageous deed."

So she resolved and went to fetch the casket
1055 in which her many drugs, some good, some baneful,
were kept. She set it on her knees and wept.
Her nightgown's folds were wet so thoroughly

with tears that streams of grief were flowing from her.
Shrilly lamenting, keening her own death,
1060 she wanted to reach out, select, and swallow
poison to end her life. She was already
unfastening the hasps in her desire
to take it out, poor girl. Soon, though, a deathly
antipathy to baneful Hades vanquished
1065 (811) the urge. She was a long time held there, speechless.
The heart-delighting joys of daylight sparkled
before her eyes, and she recalled the countless
pleasures the living relish and recalled
her darling playmates, as a maiden would.
1070 So long as she kept going over all
these pleasures one by one inside her mind,
the light of life was sweeter to behold
than it had been before. And so she took
the casket off her knees and set it down.
1075 Hera had redirected her intentions.
No longer did Medea waver, no,
she yearned for sunrise, burned to meet the stranger
face-to-face, and offer him the drug.
Over and over she undid the door bolt
1080 (822) and peeped out waiting for the glow of daybreak,
and welcome were the rays that Dawn shot forth.
People throughout the city started stirring,
and Argus bade his brothers stay behind
to monitor the girl's resolve while he
1085 slipped out and went before them to the ship.

Soon as the maiden saw that Dawn had come,
she tied off with her hands the golden tresses
that had been hanging loose in disarray.
Once she had pinched her cheeks and doused her body
1090 in fragrant oil, she put a brilliant robe on
and pinned it with exquisite, spiral brooches.
Last of all, she donned a veil—it shone
like silver over her ambrosial features.
And so she pirouetted round her chamber,
1095 (836) oblivious to all the griefs before her
and all those that would multiply with time.

Twelve handmaids, each her age, and each unmarried,
slept in the forecourt of her fragrant chamber.
She summoned them and bade them harness mules

1100beneath a cart to bring her to the goddess
Hecate's handsome temple. When her handmaids
had gone to rig the cart, Medea opened
the hollow casket and removed a tincture,
a drug called Prometheon.

If a man

1105should first appease the Lone-Begotten Virgin
with nighttime sacrifice and then anoint
his body with this extract, he would be
invulnerable against all strokes of bronze,
unscorchable by blasts of blazing fire,
1110 (850)and greater for a day than any mortal
in might and bravery.

The herb first sprouted
after the flesh-devouring eagle dripped
tortured Prometheus' bloody ichor
onto the rugged slopes of the Caucasus.
1115Twin stalks emerged and then, atop them, flowers
closest in hue to the Corycian crocus.
Their taproots looked like freshly slaughtered flesh;
their resin, like a mountain oak's black sap.

Before the girl had used a Caspian seashell
1120to catch the resin and prepare the potion,
she had bathed in ever-flowing waters
seven times and seven times invoked
Brimo the Youth Nurse, Brimo Dark Traverser
and Netherworldly Queen. The night was starless,
1125 (863)and the girl had donned a pitch-black mantle.
When the Titanian root was severed, Earth
shook from her depths and raised a groan because
the son of Iapetus himself was groaning,
his soul twisted with pain. Such was the drug
1130she took and placed inside the fragrant band
supporting her ambrosial breasts.

She left

her room and climbed aboard the swift-wheeled cart.
When two handmaids had climbed aboard beside her,
she took the reins and braided whip in hand
1135and drove through town. The other handmaids gripped
a basket at the wagon's rear and jogged
along the broad cart road, their gauzy skirts
hiked as high up as their shining thighs.

Just as when Leto's daughter Artemis,
1140 (877)after a bath in the Amnisus River
or the Parthenius' tepid shallows,
ascends her golden car and rides through hills
behind a team of swift-hooved bucks to visit
steaming and fat-rich cattle sacrifices,
1145a retinue of nymphs beside her, some
assembled from the source of the Amnisus,
others from groves and many-fountained summits
and, everywhere around her as she passes,
the wild creatures fawn and whimper—so
1150the young girls sped through town, and all the people
gave way and shunned the royal maiden's gaze.

Once she had left the well-built city roads
and traveled through a plain, she reined the mules in
before the shrine, jumped from the smooth-wheeled
wagon,
1155 (890)full of desire, and said to her attendants:

"Goodness, my friends, what a mistake I made!
I never stopped to think it wasn't safe
with all those strangers roaming through our kingdom.
The whole city is wild with turmoil, so
1160none of the women who attend the temple
have come today. Since we are here, however,
and no one else is coming, let's delight
our hearts with choral song. Once we have picked
these gorgeous flowers from the tender grass,
1165we shall return at our accustomed hour.

And you will go home rich in gifts today
if you agree to do me one small favor:
Argus, you see, will not stop begging me to—
Chalciope as well—oh, but be sure
1170 (903)to keep the words I tell you to yourselves
so that they never reach my father's ears—
well, it's about the stranger who agreed
to undertake the trial of the oxen—
you see, they asked me to accept his gifts
1175and keep him safe in that atrocious contest.

Well, once the terms were set, I bade the stranger
come here alone, apart from his companions,

to meet me face-to-face, so that we girls
might share among ourselves whatever gifts
1180he brings us. We shall give him, in exchange,
a very potent herbal tincture. Please, though,
stand at a distance when the man arrives.”

So she requested, and her subtle words
persuaded all the maids.

As soon as Argus
1185 (913) learned from his brothers that the girl had left
at daybreak for the shrine of Hecate,
he led the son of Aeson out alone,
apart from his companions, through the plain.
And with them went the offspring of Ampycus,
1190 Mopsus, an expert at interpreting
bird signs and guiding heroes on their quests.

Never among the men of long ago—
not among all those sired by Zeus himself,
nor among those the other gods begot—
1195 had any man appeared as irresistible
to speak with and adore as on that day
Jason appeared. Hera the wife of Zeus
had made him so. Even his comrades marveled
as they admired his radiant appeal,
1200 (925) and Mopsus swaggered as they walked because
he knew already of the trip’s success.

Beside the footpath through the plain there stands,
next to the shrine of Hecate, a poplar
that wears long hair, innumerable leaves.
1205 Crows regularly sit and chatter in it,
and one of them was way up toward the crown
flapping its wings as they were walking by.
At Hera’s prompting it insulted Mopsus:

“You are a sorry sort of seer, too stupid
1210 to recognize what even children know:
a maiden never tells a gentleman
sweet words of love when others are around.
Get yourself gone, false prophet, bad adviser.
Neither Cypris nor the gentle love gods
1215 (937) breathe their seductive kindnesses your way.”

So spoke the crow in insult. Mopsus, though,
when he had heard the sacred bird's command,
smiled in reply and said:

“You go on, Jason,
go on and meet the maiden at the temple.
1220Her welcome will be very warm indeed
thanks to the goddess Cypris, who will help you
complete the labor, just as Phineus
the son of Agenor predicted to you.
Argus and I will wait right here until
1225you finish. You alone must state your case
and win her over with convincing phrases.”

So he insisted, under good advisement,
and his companions gave assent at once.

Medea's heart, however much she sang,
1230 (949)could not escape from thoughts of Jason, Jason.
None of the tunes she tried distracted her
for long. She broke them off in helplessness
and failed to hold her gaze steady and constant
upon her maids. Her head kept swiveling;
1235she kept on staring out along the roadways.
Time and time again the heart convulsed
within her breast as she debated whether
a passing sound was footsteps or the wind.

Soon he appeared. Her longing eyes perceived him
1240rising from the horizon, as the Dog Star,
Sirius, rises from the River Ocean—
mesmerizing, beautiful—to wreak
unspeakable destruction on the flocks.
In just such splendor did the son of Aeson
1245 (961)rise into view, and his arrival leveled
still greater anguish at the lovesick girl.
Her heart dropped from her breast, her eyes were fog,
and hectic redness chafed her cheeks. She lost
the strength to lift her knees and move forward
1250or back. Her soles were rooted to the earth.

Meanwhile the handmaids had withdrawn from them.
The two stood face-to-face, unspeaking, silent
like oaks or lofty pines that stand unrustled
beside each other on a windless day

1255 atop a peak, until a gust of wind
rouses them, and they rustle ceaselessly.
So both of them would soon have much to say
under the impact of the gusts of Eros.
Jason could tell the gods had sunk the girl
in madness, so he plied her gently:

1260 (975) "Maiden,
why are you scared to be alone with me?
I'm not like other men, a no-good boaster,
not now or back when I was in my homeland.
Therefore, though you are young, don't act so wildly
1265 bashful before me that you shrink from saying
what you desire, or anything at all.
Since we have come with goodwill toward each other
and meet on hallowed ground where harmful deeds
are sacrilege, speak freely, ask your questions.
1270 But please don't lead me on by saying simply
what I would like to hear, since from the outset
you have assured your sister you will give me
the strength-inspiring potion.

I beseech you
both in your parents' names and in the names
1275 (986) of holy Hecate and Zeus Upholder
of Suppliants and Strangers. I have come,
a suppliant and stranger, to embrace
your knees in desperation, since alone—
that is, without your favor—I shall never
1280 return successful from this wretched contest.

I am prepared to pay you future honor
for your assistance, all the honor due
between two people living far apart,
by glorifying both your name and virtues.
1285 After my comrades have returned to Greece,
they, too, will spread your fame, as will their mothers
and wives, who right now possibly are sitting
and wailing on the shore. You, you could scatter
their cruel flock of worries on the winds.

1290 (998) Minos' maiden daughter Ariadne
once rescued Theseus from a deadly trial—
yes, Helios' daughter Pasiphae,
the sister of your father, was her mother.
Once Minos had recovered from his anger,

1295the girl embarked upon the hero's ship
and left her fatherland. Even the gods
adored this girl, and a memento of her,
a garland known as Ariadne's Crown,
revolves among the heavenly constellations
1300at night. The gods will give you thanks as well
if you assist so mighty an assembly
of heroes. Judging from your beauty, you
should be supreme in gentle kindnesses."

So he addressed her, playing to her pride.
1305 (1008)She dropped her gaze but, as she did, a smile
as sweet as nectar spread across her face.
Her heart had thawed beneath his flattery.
When she looked up at him again, she failed
to find words fit to start with, since she was
1310so keen to tell him everything at once.

All modesty behind her, she removed
the vial of resin from her fragrant bodice,
and he was quick to wrap his hands around it.
He seemed so very pleased. She would have tugged
1315the soul out of her breast and happily
bestowed it on this man who needed her.
Eros had kindled a miraculous
and winning fire on Jason's golden hair,
and he was ravishing her gaze. Her eyes
1320 (1020)were glinting, and her heart grew warm and melted
like dew on roses in the dawn's first light.

Each of them awkwardly admired the ground
at times and then at times kept firing glances
at one another, shooting forth desire
1325from underneath their brows. A good while later,
under extreme duress, the girl brought out:

"Please listen. I shall give you some instructions:
Once my father has bestowed upon you
the serpent's deadly fangs to sow the field,
1330wait for the darkest hour of the night,
then wash your body in a rushing river,
don an all-black mantle, and retire
somewhere alone, apart from your companions,
and dig a wide round hole. Once you have slit

1335 (1033)an ewe's throat, drained the blood into the pit,
and laid the carcass, whole, upon a fire
that you have duly built up round the edges,
call upon Hecate, the only child
of Perses, while decanting from a goblet
1340the comb-begotten labor of the bees.
Then, after you have dutifully sought
Hecate's favor, turn and leave. Make certain
neither the sound of footsteps nor the baying
of dogs moves you to turn and look behind you,
1345or you will cancel all that you have done
and fail to come back ready to your comrades.

At daybreak steep the drug I have provided
in pure spring water, strip off all your clothes,
and rub your body with it as with oil.

1350 (1044)There will be awesome power and boundless valor
within it. You will find your strength a match
not for mere mortals but the deathless gods.
Sprinkle your shield, sword, and spear with it.
The weapons of the earthborn men will never
1355injure you then, nor the unbearable fire
that shoots out of the deadly bulls. Not long
will you be so enhanced, just one day only.
Be sure, then, not to shrink before the challenge.

And I shall grace you with a second favor:

1360once you have yoked the mighty bulls and swiftly
with might and main plowed up the stubborn fallows,
then, as the earthborn men are sprouting skyward
out of the snake's fangs planted in the furrows,
cast a stone into their midst, a large one.
1365 (1057)Make certain no one sees you. They will slaughter
each other over it, like wild dogs
contending over scraps of food. Make sure
that you yourself then rush into the fray.
Because of your successes you will carry
1370the fleece back into Hellas, to some place
far from Aea. Go, though, all the same,
wherever you desire, wherever you
insist on going once you spread your sail."

With that, she fixed her eyes before her feet
1375in silence and suffused her gleaming cheeks

with sultry tears, bereft because he soon
would sail the sea far, far away from her.
She took his hand and gazed upon his face.
Modesty left her eyes, and yet again
in agony she spoke to him:

1380 (1069)“Remember
the name Medea if, by chance, you live
to come back home. When you are far away
I shall remember yours as well. Please, though,
kindly inform me where your home might be.
1385Where will you go when you go sailing off
across the sea? Will you approach luxurious
Orchomenus or skirt Aeaea Island?
And please do tell me more about that girl,
the one you named, you know, the famous daughter
1390of Pasiphae, who is my father’s sister.”

Such were her inquiries, and devastating
affection crept up over him, because
she was a maiden, crying. So he answered:

“Never, day or night, shall I forget you—
1395 (1080)that is, so long as I escape my death
and do return uninjured to Achaea,
and if Aeëtes doesn’t force still worse
trials upon us. If you wish to know
about my homeland, I will tell you of it.
1400My heart as well commands I do as much:
there is a broad plain ringed by lofty mountains,
a sheep land rich in pasture. It was there
Prometheus, the son of Iapetus,
begat the excellent Deucalion
1405who was the first to draw up plans for cities
and raise temples to the immortal gods.
He also was the first to serve as king.
My people call this land Haemonia.
My city Iolcus stands in it, and in it
1410 (1092)stand a hundred other cities where
the name Aea never has been heard.
And, yes, a legend states that Minyas,
a son of Aeolus, once left this land
to build the city of Orchomenus
1415on the Cadmeians’ eastern border. Why, though,
do I keep rambling on about my home

and Minos' most reverend daughter
Ariadne? (That's the famous name
the lovely maiden you have asked about
1420once called her own.) I pray that, just as Minos
eventually accepted Theseus,
your father may be joined to us in friendship."

So he responded, stroking her with soothing
utterances. Most distressing worries, though,
1425 (1104)kept troubling her heart, and she was sad
when she addressed these throbbing words to him:

"Although in Hellas it may be considered
noble to keep one's word, Aeëtes differs
greatly in that regard from Minos, husband
1430of Pasiphae—that man you mentioned to me.
Nor do I rank myself with Ariadne.
Say nothing, therefore, of a fond guest-friendship.
But think of me when you return to Iolcus,
and I shall think of you in spite of all
1435my parents say. May news or bird of omen
bring us together, when we live apart.
Yet, if I slip your mind, may sudden storm winds
snatch me aloft and carry me to Iolcus,
so that I may confront you face-to-face,
1440 (1115)reproaching you, reminding you that you
escaped this land alive by my assistance.
Yes, may I then appear out of the blue
and haunt you right beside your palace hearth."

So she proclaimed, with liquid sorrow streaming
1445down her cheeks. After a while he answered:

"Sad maiden, let your storm winds rove
in vain and all your birds and rumors, too.
You're talking nonsense. If you come to Greece
and any of those places you have mentioned,
1450men and women will esteem and love you,
yes, they will venerate you like a goddess,
some because your counsel helped their sons
come home alive, others because you saved
their brothers, relatives, and valiant husbands
1455 (1127)from such great trouble. In our wedding chamber
you shall enjoy the marriage bed with me,

and nothing shall divide us from our love
until our predetermined end enshrouds us.”

So he explained. The heart within her melted
1460to hear it, but she shuddered as it did,
imagining the crime she would commit.
Poor maiden, she would not long shrink from living
in Hellas. Hera had already ruled
Medea of Aea would forsake
1465her fatherland and come to holy Iolcus
to ruin Pelias.

Meanwhile the handmaids
watching them in silence from afar
grew agitated: daylight was expiring;
Medea should be home beside her mother.
1470 (1140)The girl herself had not yet thought of leaving,
since she was so bewitched by Jason’s beauty
and winning words. It was the son of Aeson
who sensed the hour and said to her at last:

“It’s time for us to go, or else the sun
1475will set before you reach the court, and someone
will note your absence and discover all.
But we will come back here and meet again.”

They tested one another with endearments
so far, then turned and went their separate ways,
1480Jason departing to his crew and ship
in an exultant mood, she to her handmaids.
They all went out to meet her, but she hardly
noticed them gathering around her, no,
her soul was flying through the clouds. Her feet
1485 (1152)all on their own conveyed her to the wagon.
One hand reached out to take the reins, the other
the intricately braided whip, and off
the mules went toward the city and the palace.

When they returned, Chalcioppe of course
1490asked questions, since she hoped to save her sons.
The girl, though, spun by swiftly shifting thoughts,
heard nothing and was not disposed to answer.
She settled on a stool beside her bed,
cheek resting flat upon her clenched left hand,
1495and worried, teary-eyed, about the plot

she had devised, how traitorous it was.

When Jason joined his comrades at the spot
where he had left them to approach Medea,
he set out with them toward their shore-side camp,
1500 (1165) recounting what she'd said along the way.
They reached the ship together. When the heroes
caught sight of Aeson's son, they greeted him
with questions, and he told them all about
the maiden's scheme and showed the potent drug.
1505 Though Idas sat apart from his companions
and gnawed his anger, all the rest were joyful
and, when the lateness of the hour compelled them,
cheerfully went about their chores.

At daybreak
they sent a pair of soldiers to Aeëtes
1510 to fetch the seed—Telamon, dear to Ares,
and Hermes' famous son Aethalides.
Nor did this embassy set out in vain:
when they arrived haughty Aeëtes gave them
the dire fangs of the Aonian serpent
they needed for the contest.

1515 (1178) While in Hellas
searching for Europa, Cadmus found
this serpent watching over Ares' spring
in ancient Thebes. He slew it there and founded
a town at the direction of the heifer
1520 that gave him guidance, as the Lord Apollo
had prophesied. Tritonian Athena
knocked the fangs out of the serpent's jaws
and gave half to Aeëtes, half to Cadmus
the son of Agenor, the monster's slayer,
1525 who planted them in the Aonian plain
and took as citizens those earthborn men
left over after Ares harvested
the others with his spear.

Aeëtes gave them
the serpent's fangs to carry to the ship
1530 (1189) and did so gladly since he never thought
Jason would actually complete the labor,
even if he somehow yoked the oxen.

The sun god Helios was gliding under
the twilight earth beyond the farthest summits

1535 of Aethiopia, and Night was yoking
her mares, and all the men had made their beds
beside the *Argo's* cables—all but Jason.
Once the Greater Bear, the constellation
Helica, had descended, and the air
1540 had gone completely still beneath the heavens,
he slipped off like some calculating thief
to a deserted spot with the supplies
he needed. He had spent the whole day fretting
over the details. Argus had already
1545 (1199) brought in an ewe and fresh milk from the sheepfold,
and Jason fetched the rest out of the *Argo*.

When he had found a spot out of the way
and free of traffic, a deserted heath
beneath an open sky, he duly bathed
1550 his supple body in a sacred stream,
then wrapped around his limbs a pure-black mantle,
the one that Lemnian Hypsipyle
had given him as a memento of
innumerable vehement caresses.

1555 He dug a pit, a cubit wide and deep,
placed logs and sticks therein, and lit a bonfire,
then slit a sheep's throat over it and duly
laid on the victim. Once the fire was burning
solidly upward from the woodpile's base,
1560 (1210) he poured a mix of liquid offerings
upon it, begging Brimo Hecate
please to assist him in the coming trial.
After the prayer, he backed up without turning.
The awesome goddess heard him and ascended
1565 through deep moist caverns to accept his gifts,
and horrid serpents crowned her head, with oak leaves
mixed in among them, and the glow of torches
gleamed far and wide, and hellhounds howled keenly
around her, and the swampy meadow trembled
1570 beneath her footsteps. All the moorland nymphs,
the ones who traipse in rings around the flats
of Amaranthian Phasis, trilled and shrieked.
Though awe instantly gripped the son of Aeson,
he never once turned round and looked behind him,
1575 (1222) and so his feet returned him to his comrades.
The Early-Rising Dawn, by then, had climbed

over the snowcapped peaks of the Caucasus.

Aeëtes, meanwhile, round his torso bound
a hard breastplate, a special gift from Ares.
1580The god, in fact, had worn this very armor
when he had cut Phlegraeon Mimas down.
Then King Aeëtes put his helmet on,
a four-plumed marvel, golden and as bright as
sunlight emerging from the River Ocean.

1585Next he took up a buckler thick with bull hide
and formidable spear. None of the heroes
could have withstood it, no, not since the hero
Heracles left the roster. He alone
could have opposed that mighty shaft in battle.

1590 (1235)Phaëthon was waiting near at hand
holding a tight-knit chariot and team
of fleet-foot stallions for the king to mount.
Aeëtes soon got in, received the reins,
and took the broad cart road out of the city
1595to reach the field of contest. Countless rushing
citizens thronged around him. Think of how
the god Poseidon travels in his war car
to Isthmia to watch the sacred games,
or Lerna's spring, Taenarus or the holy
1600greenery of Hyantian Onchestus
before proceeding to Calaurea,
Haemonian Petra, forested Geraestus—
that's how Aeëtes looked, the Colchian chieftain,
riding behind a team of chargers.

Jason,

1605 (1246)meanwhile, obeyed the precepts of Medea,
steeped the magic herbs and laved his shield,
sword, and sturdy spear with the concoction.
When his companions pounded on the spear
to test its fortitude, they failed to blemish
1610the metal even a little—it emerged
fresh and undented from their mighty blows.
When Idas son of Aphareus wildly
hacked at the spear butt with his giant broadsword,
the blade rebounded, and the clang resembled
1615that of a hammer that has struck an anvil,
and all the heroes whooped with ecstasy
before the trial.

As soon as Jason rubbed
his body with the salve, he felt divine
and boundless vigor welling up within him.
1620 (1258) His hands were tingling, quivering with vim.
Think of a warhorse eager for a fight,
the way it neighs and stamps the ground, the way
it rears its neck and pricks its ears, exulting—
that's how the son of Aeson looked, exulting
1625 in the excitement of his newfound strength.
The way he ran around, kicked up his heels,
and waved his ash-wood spear and big bronze shield,
you would have thought of winter lightning flashing
against a pitch-black sky, the bright forks shooting
1630 from clouds that bring a thunderstorm in tow.

No longer wary of the trial, the heroes
took their places at the rowing benches
and fought the stream. The plain of Ares lay
upriver on the far side of the city
1635 (1272) as distant from them as a chariot
must travel from the starting line to reach
the turning post, when a deceased king's kinsmen
put on games for charioteers and sprinters
to do him honor. When the heroes landed,
1640 they found the Colchians sitting at the foot
of the Caucasus while Aeëtes wheeled
his chariot along the riverbank.

Soon as his shipmates bound the hawsers, Jason
vaulted ashore and swaggered to the lists,
1645 on one arm shield and spear and in the other
the burnished bowl of a bronze helmet, brimful
of jagged fangs. Save for these armaments,
he was all nude, like Ares, some would say,
or Lord Apollo of the golden sword.

1650 (1284) His sweeping survey of the fallows found
a bronze yoke and a plow compact as iron,
its haft and harrow hewn out of one trunk.
Nimble he jogged out to the plow and yoke,
planted the spear butt in the soil, propped the
1655 helm up against the shaft. Then, stripping down
to shield alone, he backtracked through a haze
of exhalation countless cloven hoofprints

until he struck on something like a burrow
or buried stall. Thence the bulls burst abruptly,
1660 muzzle and nostril of a sudden scorching
the air around him. Soldiers on the sidelines
recoiled in terror, but not Jason, no—
he spread his feet for leverage and fought them,
taking the shock as a rock headland greets
1665 (1295) the big waves rising from a sudden squall.
Roaring, they stabbed and slashed with brutish horns,
ramming his buckler with their brows, but Jason
never retreated, never gave an inch.

Think of a blacksmith's bull-hide bellows, now
1670 shooting a spire of cinders through a vent
while stirring up the deadly blaze, now wheezing,
now still, and all the while infernal hiss
and flicker issue from the furnace grate—
panting and heaving thus, the bulls snuffed thrice
1675 and bellowed, and a brimstone blast consumed him,
calamitous but for the maiden's salve.

He gripped the tip of a right horn and yanked
masterfully, muscles taut, until the neck
had met the yoke. A quick kick followed after,
1680 (1308) foot against brazen fetlock, and the beast
was hunkered on its knees. A second kick
crumpled the other. Casting shield aside,
he bore, head-on, a swirling ball of flame
by gripping earth more widely with his feet,
1685 his left hand and his right holding the bulls
bent over both on buckled knees.

Meanwhile

Aeëtes gaped at Jason's fortitude
and Castor and his brother Polydeuces
played their part and dragged the yoke afield.
1690 Soon as the bulls' hump necks were harnessed, Jason
fed the bronze brace beam between the team
and drove its beveled end into the yoke loop.
The brothers shrank back from the flames, but Jason
took up his buckler, slung it over his shoulder,
1695 (1321) and cradled in his arm the helm brimful
of jagged fangs. Like a Pelasgic farmer,
he pricked the oxen's haunches with his spear
and steered the stubborn plow unbreakable.

The bulls still mettlesome, still spitting out
1700eddies of frustrate flame, a roaring sounded
loud as the lightning-frazzled gusts that warn
old tars to reef the mainsail. Soon enough
they lumbered forward at the spear's insistence;
soon enough the hoof-drawn harrow cleft
1705boulders and left them crumbled in its wake.
Clods with the girth of soldiers loudly ruptured
and turned to tilth. Feet planted on the draw bar,
he sledged after, and each backward toss
sent fangs some distance from him, lest the rows
1710 (1338)of earthborn soldiers rush him unprepared.
And still the bulls leaned on their brazen hooves
and lumbered forward.

At the hour when elsewhere
the third part of a workday still remained
and plodding plowmen prayed aloud that soon
1715the sweet hour of unyoking would arrive,
here was a field already tilled and sown,
and Jason shooed a tame team back to pasture.

Since he could see no earthborn soldiers sprouting
out of the soil, he paused to catch his breath
1720and walked back to the *Argo* where his mates
gathered around him, whistling and whooping.
He scooped the river with his helm, drank deeply,
and slaked his thirst. Stretching from side to side
to keep his muscles' suppleness, he puffed
1725 (1350)his chest with lust for battle—rippling, ready,
keen as a boar that whets its tusks on oak
while slaver dribbles earthward from its snout.

Now in the god of slaughter's garden sprang
an army nursed in earth—all rounded shields
1730and tufted spears and crested helmets bristling;
and from the soil through middle air the glint
shot to the gods. As, when a heavy snowfall
has covered all the fields, fresh gusts will scatter
the clouds in patches from a moonless night,
1735and crowds of congregated constellations
light up the darkness from both sky and snow—
so rose the soldiers from the furrows, sparkling.

Jason obeyed the mandates of the maiden,

the clever one. He lifted from the field
1740 (1365) a great round rock, the war god's shot to toss,
a mass four strapping laborers would struggle
to budge in vain. Raising it without strain,
he spun round and around and cast it far
into their midst, then under his buckler crouched,
1745 valiant, in hiding. The Colchians went wild,
roaring as hoarsely as the sea swell roars
on jagged cliffs. Aeëtes stood there dumbstruck,
dreading what would come. The earthborn soldiers
like famished mongrels snapping for a morsel
1750 mangled each other round the boulder, falling
to Mother Earth beneath each other's spears
like oaks or pines a leveling wind lays low.

Then, as a fiery meteor shoots from heaven
trailing a wake of light (a signal always
1755 (1379) ominous to the men who see its brilliance
separate the night), the son of Aeson
dashed on the earthborn ones with naked sword,
slashed here and there and harvested them all—
the seedlings grown as far as chest and back,
1760 the waist-high, the knee-deep, those freshly afoot
and rushing to the fray—all fell beneath him.

As, when a border war has broken out,
a man who fears that foes will torch his yield
seizes upon a freshly whetted scythe
1765 and runs to reap the too-green grain before
the proper time has parched it to perfection,
Jason mowed the growth of soldiers. Blood
flowed in the furrows like torrential flooding,
and still they fell—some, stumbling forward, bit
1770 (1393) the fine-ground, fang-fomenting dirt, some backward
tumbled or wallowed on an arm or flank
like beached sea beasts; a hundred more, hamstrung
before they first took steps upon the earth,
slumped over just as far with drooping head
as they had sprouted into air.

1775 Such ruin,
one can imagine, pelting Zeus would wreak
upon a vineyard—nurslings sprawling, stalks
snapped at the root, and so much labor wasted,
a crushing heartbreak and dejection pressing

1780the vintner who had set the slips himself.
In such wise, heavy grief of mind came over
Aeëtes, and he turned homeward to Colchis
together with his Colchians contriving
how he might best contest the strangers' claim.
1785The sun went down, and Jason's work was done.

BOOK 4

Now Zeus' daughter, deathless Muse, describe
for me the Colchian maiden's wiles and worries.
The mind within me spins in speechlessness,
wondering whether I should call the impulse
that drove her to forsake the Colchian people
a wild obsession's lovesick injury
or headlong panic running from disgrace.

Up in the palace all night long Aeëtes
worked with his council on a foolproof plan
to catch the heroes. He was vengeance-hearted,
wildly incensed about the painful contest,
but never for a moment thought his daughters
had worked to bring about the stranger's triumph.

Hera, meanwhile, had pierced Medea's heart
with poignant dread. The girl was shaking like
a nimble fawn that baying hounds have trapped,
trembling, in a densely wooded thicket.
All in a flash she sensed the aid she gave
the foreigners had not escaped her father;
her cup of woe would soon be overflowing;
surely her handmaids would divulge the crime.

Her eyes were full of fire, her ears abuzz
with trepidation. Time and time again
she gripped her throat, time and again pulled out
her hair, and moaned in sorry misery.
She would have drained a vial of poison, died
right then and there before her proper time,
and ruined all of Hera's plans, had not
the goddess driven her to run away,
in utter terror, with the sons of Phrixus.
Once her fluttering heart had calmed, she poured
the potions from her lap into the casket.
She kissed her bed good-bye and kissed the frame
around the double doors and stroked the walls.
She clipped a lock and left it for her mother
as a memento of her maidenhood,

then, sobbing, brought out heartfelt lamentation:

“I’m going, Mother, but have left this tress
to take my place when I am gone—farewell.
40Farewell, Chalciope. Farewell, old home.
Stranger, I wish the sea had torn you up
before you ever reached the land of Colchis.”

So she spoke, and from her eyelids tears
came pouring down. Picture a girl that fate
45 (35)has torn out of a wealthy home and homeland,
how, since she is unused to heavy labor
and ignorant of what slaves do and suffer,
she goes abroad to serve a mistress’
relentless whims in terror—that’s the way
50lovely Medea crept out of the palace.
The latches on the doors undid themselves
all on their own before her muttered spells.
Barefoot, she scampered down the narrow alleys,
her left hand pressed against her brow and draping
55a veil that cloaked her eyes and radiant cheeks,
her right hand holding up her dress’s hem.

So, frantic and in fear, she made her way
by covert routes outside the battlements
of broadly paved Aea. No watchmen
60 (49)observed her, no, she hastened past unseen.
Safely outside, she contemplated deep
within herself how best to reach the temple.
She was quite familiar with the roads
since she had traveled on them many times
65in search of corpses and the earth’s worst herbs,
the kinds that witches use. Convulsive terror
fluttered her spirit.

The Titanian Moon

had just then risen over the horizon.
She saw the maiden straying far from home
70in misery and cackled to herself:

“Well, well, I’m not the only one, it seems,
to slip away into a Latmian grotto,
no, not the only one to burn with love
for an adorable Endymion.
75 (59)You bitch! How often you have woven magic

to drive me from the sky in search of love
so that, in total darkness, you could work
your sorcery at ease, your precious spells.
Now you are subject to the same obsession
80I suffered. Yes, the god of lust has given
Jason to you—a grievous blow. Go on,
suffer, for all your ingenuity,
a heavy sentence fraught with misery.”

So Moon was thinking, as the maiden’s feet
85carried her, swiftly, on. The riverbank
was steep but welcome to her, since she saw,
on the opposing bank, the vivid bonfires
the heroes had been stoking all night long
to celebrate the victory. A sound
90 (72)out of the night, she called across the stream
to Phrontis, youngest son of Phrixus. He,
his brothers, even Jason recognized
her voice, and all the heroes stared in silence.
They knew, of course, just what was happening.
95She shouted “Phrontis” thrice, and Phrontis thrice
responded, at the crew’s encouragement.
The ship, meanwhile, was swiftly heading toward her
under oar. Before they threw the cables
onto the facing bank, the son of Aeson
100had vaulted from the deck. Phrontis and Argus,
two sons of Phrixus, jumped ashore behind him.
Clasping their legs with either hand, she pleaded:

“I’m helpless. Save me, friends, from King Aeëtes,
and save yourselves. My deeds have come to light.
105 (85)Danger is everywhere around me now.
Let us escape by ship before he mounts
his eager chargers. I myself will win you
the fleece by putting its protector serpent
to sleep. First, though, in front of your companions,
110you, stranger man, must call the gods to witness
the oath you gave—that you shall never leave me
contemptible, despised, without protection,
once I have traveled far away from home.”

Though she had uttered anguish, Jason’s heart
115greatly rejoiced. He hurried over to her
and eased her up from where she had collapsed

around her brothers' knees. His words were soothing:

"Sad maiden, may Olympian Zeus himself
and Hera, Wife of Zeus and Queen of Marriage,
120 (97) attest that I shall take you to my palace
to be my wedded wife, once we have made
our journey home to Greece."

Such was his pledge,
and he was quick to clasp her hand in his.
She ordered them to row the swift ship nearer
125 the sacred grove, so that they could acquire
the fleece against the wishes of Aeëtes
and sail off under cover of the night.
Their haste was such that word and deed were one.
They took the girl aboard and shoved off quickly,
130 and loud, then, were the grunts of heroes straining
to work the oars. Medea ran astern
and reached her hands out sadly toward her homeland,
but Jason soothed her fears with heartening words
and held her in his arms.

It was the hour
135 (109) when huntsmen shake the slumber from their eyes
(because they want the most out of their dogs,
they never sleep the full night, no, they start
before the potent light of dawn effaces
the quarry's signs and scents). Such was the hour
140 when Jason and Medea disembarked
onto a grassy meadow that is called
"The Manger of the Ram" because the ram
first bent its knees in utter weariness
upon it, after bearing on his back
145 Minyan Phrixus, offspring of Athamas.
There was a soot-stained course of stones nearby,
the bottom of the shrine that Aeolid Phrixus
set up for Zeus the God of Fugitives.
That was the spot where Phrixus sacrificed
150 (120) the gilded miracle at Hermes' bidding
(the god had kindly met him on the way).
At Argus' behest, the heroes landed
Jason and Medea near this altar.
They took a footpath, reached the sacred grove,
155 and found the huge oak tree from which the fleece
was hanging, brilliant as a cloud that glows
red in the rays of fiery dawn.

The serpent
lying before it reared his endless neck.
The sleepless slits had been alert and caught them
160approaching, and his hiss was loud and monstrous.
The whole grove, then the riverbanks resounded.
Many Colchians heard it, though they lived
as far off as Titanian Aea,
way out beside the sources of the Lycus
165 (132)which, as it leaves the loud, sacred Araxes,
joins with the river Phasis, and they swirl
together down to the Caucasian Sea.
Young mothers started up in trepidation
and squeezed the newborns cradled in their arms.
Their little limbs were quivering.

170Imagine
spirals, innumerable coils of smoke,
swirling above a pile of smoldering wood,
one billow coming swiftly on another,
each of them rising in a hazy wreath—
175that's how the serpent rode on countless coils
covered with hard dry scales.

Soon, though, the maiden
fixed the writhing creature with her gaze
and summoned with a sweet voice Sleep the Helper,
the highest of the gods, to charm the serpent.
180 (147)She also asked the Netherworldly Queen,
the Late-Night Wanderer, to support the venture.
Jason, terrified, came on behind her.

The song, though, had already charmed the snake.
Loosing the tension of his coils, he settled
185upon his countless spirals like a dark wave
settling soft and soundless on a sluggish sea.
Still, though, his crested head was lifted, still
he burned to grip them in his deadly jaws,
and so the maiden dipped a fresh-cut sprig
190of juniper into a magic potion
and drizzled it into his open eyes,
warbling all the while a lullaby,
as the aroma of its potency
spread sleep. The monster laid his head down then,
195 (160)and his innumerable convolutions
lay flat among the undergrowth behind him.

Then, at the maiden's bidding, Jason took
the golden fleece down from the topmost boughs.
She stayed right where she had been, raining slumber
200 upon the serpent's head, till Jason told her
the time had come to head back to the *Argo*.
So they left the leaf-dark grove of Ares.

Just as a maiden catches in a gauzy gown
the shimmer of the full moon as it rises
205 above her lofty chamber, and her heart
rejoices as she looks upon the light,
so, then, did Jason hold the great fleece up.
A sheepfold's worth of wool gave forth a gleam
like flame that flushed his comely cheeks and brow.
210 (174) Wide as a yearling ox's hide or that of
the stag that huntsmen call the "moose," the fleece
was golden on the surface, heavy, dense,
and thick with wool. The path that Jason followed
glimmered before him every step he took.
215 He started with the fleece around his neck
dangling from his shoulder to his ankles,
then rolled it up and stroked it, fearing greatly
some man or god would come and take it from him.

Dawn was already spreading through the world
220 when they arrived at camp. The heroes marveled
at the colossal fleece, jumped up and down,
giddy to touch it, take it in their hands,
but Jason held them back and threw across it
a freshly woven robe. He scooped the girl up,
225 (189) set her down astern, and spoke as follows:

"No longer, friends, restrain yourselves from turning
homeward. By this maiden's means the prize
for which we undertook our grievous voyage
and toiled in misery has been attained.
230 And I shall take her home to be my wife
since she desires that it be so. Because
she has so nobly saved both you yourselves
and all Achaea, you must keep her safe.
Quite soon, I think, Aeëtes will descend
235 with all his men around him to prevent us
from sailing from the river to the sea.
Therefore, let every other man among you

sit and attend to rowing while the rest
hold up their ox-hide shields to make a strong
240 (201)bulwark against the arrows of our foe,
and so safeguard our voyage home. We hold
parents and children, our entire homeland,
here in our hands. On our persistence hangs
the glory or the infamy of Greece.”

245Such were his words. He donned his battle armor,
and they replied with raucous cheers, and so
he drew his broadsword from the sheath and severed
the hawsers. Fully armed beside the maiden,
he stood up near the new steersman, Ancaeus,
250and soon the ship went speeding under oar,
with all his comrades heaving, passionately,
to clear the river’s mouth.

But by that time
news of Medea’s love and treachery
had spread through town and reached the Colchians
255 (214)and King Aeëtes. Armed from head to foot,
they started swarming toward the Council House
as thickly as the dead leaves tumble earthward
out of a tree with many boughs in autumn
—who could count them? So they all came swarming,
260mad with clamor, down the riverbank.
Aeëtes was preeminent among them
because he rode upon a war car drawn
by wind-swift stallions, gifts of Helius.
His left hand waved a big round shield, his right
265a giant pine-wood torch, while at his side
a six-foot throwing spear was pointing forward.
His son Absyrtus held the stallions’ reins.

The *Argo* was already off, however,
riding the river’s seaward current under
270 (228)its oarsmen’s power. Throwing up his hands
in wild frustration, King Aeëtes summoned
Zeus and Helius as witnesses
to all that he had suffered. Furthermore,
he leveled horrid threats against his people:

275*Unless they should by their own hands arrest
the maiden there on land or on the waves
of open ocean and return her to him*

*so that he could satisfy his rage
by punishing the girl for her misdeeds,
280 they all would learn, through summary beheadings,
what it was like to know his wrath and vengeance.*

So he proclaimed, and when the Colchian sailors
dragged out their warships, loaded tackle in them,
and took to water, you would not have thought
285 (239) so vast a gathering was an armada,
no, rather, an innumerable flock
of seabirds clamoring across the swell.

The winds were blowing strong to aid the heroes,
as Hera had devised, so that Medea
290 might leave Aea, reach Pelasgia,
and prove a bane to Pelias' house
as soon as possible. Three mornings later
they reached the coast of Paphlagonia
and tied the *Argo's* hawsers to the shore
295 right at the Halys River's mouth. Medea,
you see, insisted that they disembark
and honor Hecate with sacrifices.
Holy dread prevents me from divulging
all that she did to carry out the rites—
300 (249) no man should know them; let my mind cease straining
to name them. But the shrine the heroes built
to honor Hecate remains today
for later generations to admire.

Jason and all the others then remembered
305 Phineus had informed them that their route
out of Aea would be different,
but what that route would be remained unknown
to all of them, so they were quick to listen
when Argus spoke his mind about their course:

310 "We four were sailing to Orchomenus
the way the faithful seer you met en route
had forecast to you. We already knew
there is another route to Greece. The priests
who serve the powers born of Triton's daughter
315 (261) Theba recorded its discovery:

Not yet had all the stars that circle heaven

come into being, nor is any record
available, however much one searches,
about the sacred race of the Danaans.
320 Back then Arcadians alone existed,
the Apidianian Arcadians,
that is, Arcadians who, legends tell us,
lived in the mountains eating acorn mash
before the moon was born. Way back before
325 Pelasgia was under the illustrious
sons of Deucalion, the land of Egypt,
mother of all the men of old, was called
the fecund 'Misty Land,' and River Ocean
went by the name of ever-flowing 'Triton.'
330 (270) This river was required to irrigate
the Misty Land because the showers of Zeus
had never graced its soil. (The annual flooding
is what brings up the ample harvests there.)

From there, they say, a certain king, relying
335 upon his soldiers' courage, might, and vigor,
pushed through all of Europe, all of Asia,
founding settlements along the way.
Some of the cities have survived, some not.

Though many ages have expired since then,
340 Aea has remained right where it was,
along with the descendants of the men
this king had settled there. The priests, you see,
preserved this ancient knowledge by inscribing
pillars with markers. You can trace around them
345 (281) all the courses of the land and sea
from the perspective of a navigator.

The River Ocean's north-most arc is broad
and deep enough for vessels to traverse.
They label it the Ister on the pillar
350 and mark its whole course off. For quite a ways
it runs through an interminable plain
in one great rush because its sources rumble
and burst forth up in the Rhipaeon mountains,
yes, up among the blasts of Boreas.
355 However, when this mighty river enters
the country of the Scythians and Thracians,
it splits in two. Half of the water drains

right there into the Eastern Sea; the rest
reaches a deep and navigable gulf,
360 (291) a bay of the Trinacrian Sea, which borders
your homeland—that is, if the Acheloös
does, in fact, run seaward out of Hellas.”

So he submitted, and the goddess sent
a clear and timely portent. When they saw it,
365 the heroes voiced approval of the route
he had described—a comet had appeared
before them, and its tail delineated
the heading they should follow.

Giddy, then,

they dropped off Dascylus the son of Lycus
370 and in a hopeful mood put out to sea
with bellied sails. The Paphlagonian mountains
were what they steered by, but they never rounded
Carambis, since a gale and gleams of fire
from heaven haunted them until they reached
the Ister’s mighty spate.

375 (303) As for the Colchians,

one squadron sailed beyond the Clashing Rocks
out of the Pontus on a useless search.
Absyrtus turned the rest of the armada
upriver at the Ister through the inlet
380 known as “the Handsome Mouth.” Thus they went past
the neck of land and reached the farthest gulf
of the Ionian Sea before the heroes.

There is an island in the Ister’s mouth,
a large three-sided island known as Peuca.
385 While its base looks outward toward the coastline,
its apex points upriver and divides
the outflow into two. The upper entrance
is called the Narex and the lower one
the Handsome Mouth. Whereas Absyrtus sailed
390 (314) his Colchian sailors swiftly through the latter,
the heroes had already sailed around
the former.

All along the river flats

shepherds abandoned their abundant flocks
because they saw the ships as sea beasts rising
395 out of the monster-generating depths.
None of these peoples ever had observed

seagoing vessels—not the Scythians
(who breed with Thracian tribes), not the Sigynni,
not even the Graucenni or the Sindi
400(who at the time inhabited the vast
Laurian flatlands).

Once the Colchians
had skirted Mount Angurum and, beyond it,
Mount Cauliacus where the Ister splits
and drains into the sea from two directions,
405 (326)they passed, at last, the Laurian flatlands, sailed
into the Gulf of Cronus, and blockaded
the exits everywhere so that their foes
by no means ever could escape them. Meanwhile
the heroes moved downstream and reached the two
410Brygian Isles of Artemis nearby.
One of them hosts a temple sacred to her,
but the heroes landed on the other
and thus escaped the soldiers of Absyrtus.
The Colchians, you see, had left those islands,
415alone of all the islands there, untouched
because they venerated Zeus' daughter.
But they had occupied the other ones
and blocked all access to the sea. What's more,
Absyrtus had dispatched a host of soldiers
420 (336)to posts along the neighboring coasts as far
as the Salangon River and Nesteia.

Outnumbered as they were, the Minyans
would have been worsted in an ugly battle
right then and there and so they cut a treaty
425to put off all-out war. The treaty stated
the heroes could retain the golden fleece,
whether they had acquired it by guile
or simply stole it in the king's despite,
since he himself had promised it to them
430once they had proved their mettle in the contest.
Medea, though, because her case was pending,
would be released to Leto's daughter's temple
and kept apart, until one of the local
scepter-bearing kings decided whether
435 (348)she should return to King Aeëtes' palace
or travel with the Minyans to Greece.

Now, when the maiden learned about the treaty,

a wave of anguish rumbled through her body.
She rushed to Aeson's son, pulled him away
440 from his companions to a private spot,
and voiced her grievance to him, face-to-face:

"Jason, what is this plot you have conceived
concerning me? Have your successes launched you
into forgetfulness, so that you take back
445 all you said when you were gripped by need?
Where are the honeyed vows you made to me
with Zeus Savior of Suppliants as witness?
I ran off in contempt of all convention,
yes, with appalling urgency I left
450 (361) the country of my birth, a glorious palace,
even my parents—all that I held dear—
and now alone, alone at sea, I travel
among the miserable kingfishers,
and all because of you and your concerns.
455 It was because of me that you survived
the trial of the bulls and earthborn men,
and then, when our misdeeds were widely known,
I foolishly procured the fleece for you
and called down horrid shame upon my sex.
460 Now, since I am your daughter, wife, and sister,
I say that I shall sail with you to Greece.

Kindly protect me, then, in every way.
Stand at my side, no matter what transpires,
and, when you meet the magistrates, do not
465 (372) desert me, but be faithful to my cause.
Either let Justice and the Vow we sealed
between us stick steadfast within your breast
or draw your sword and slit my throat to pay me
fit retribution for my lust.

You wretch!

470 If the authority to whom you handed
this stony-hearted arbitration rules
I am my brother's chattel, how can I
endure my father's glare? Ah, reputation.
What rancor, what harsh blows will I endure
475 to pay for all the awful things I've done?
And all the while will you be off somewhere
winning your heart-delighting passage home?
Never may Zeus' wife, the mighty queen

of whom you boast, allow you to complete it.

480 (383)Remember me someday when agony
is squeezing you, and may the fleece then flutter,
dreamlike, into the depths of Erebus
and yield no good to you. Yes, may the Furies
drive you upon arrival from your homeland
485because of all I suffered through your cruelty.

Themis will not allow my execrations
to tumble unfulfilled onto the earth—
because you swore an oath to me and broke it,
you traitor-hearted man. Not long, however,
490will you and your companions sit at ease
and laugh at me, no, not for all your treaties.”

So she threatened, and her bitter rage
boiled over—how she longed to torch the ship,
ignite the whole wide world, and hurl her body
495 (394)into the blaze! Dreading what she might do,
Jason appeased her fears with honeyed words:

“Calm down, strange maiden. I don’t like this, either,
but we are seeking means to stave off war.
A thunderhead of foes is flashing round us
500because of you. The men who hold this land
are keen to help Absyrtus bring you home
because they think that you were kidnapped. Now,
if we engaged them hand to hand, we all
would suffer most abominable deaths,
505and still more bitter, then, would be your grief
if we, by dying, left you as their prize.

This parley, though, is just an artful pretext
to draw Absyrtus out to his destruction.
Once their lord, your guardian and brother,
510 (405)is dead, the locals will be far less keen
to take his side in this dispute about you.
Then I, for one, would hardly shrink from fighting
the Colchians, if they obstruct our passage.”

So Jason said in an attempt to calm her,
515but her reply was still more devastating:

“You listen now. Our shameless actions drive us to still more shameless actions. It was I who took the first false step. Once I was duped by my obsession, higher powers forced me to execute the evil scheme I plotted.

Tonight your comrades’ part will be to fend off Colchian spears in battle. Mine will be to place Absyrtus safely in your hands. I see, yes, you must welcome him to parley with splendid gifts, so that I can persuade the heralds heading back to him to make him come all alone to listen to my plan. Then, if the deed is pleasing to you, kill him and start a battle with the Colchian soldiers. I don’t care.”

So they together wove a mighty web of ruin for Absyrtus. They sent him many friendship-gifts, including the sacred raiment of Hypsipyle, a crimson gown. The Graces had themselves made it by their own hands for Dionysus on Dia. He bestowed it on his son, Thoas, and he in turn upon his daughter, Hypsipyle, who offered it to Jason to take away, a finely woven guest-gift, along with many other treasures. Neither by ogling nor fondling this garment could you fulfill your sweet desire for it. The fabric still exhaled ambrosia essence from the night when the Nysaeon king, tipsy with wine and nectar, lay upon it to fondle Ariadne’s gorgeous breasts—this is the girl whom Theseus abandoned on seagirt Dia after she eloped from Knossos with him.

Once the plan was set, Medea issued orders to the heralds—they were to tell Absyrtus to arrive after she reached the temple of the goddess in keeping with the treaty and as soon as the deepest darkness of the night had come, so that they could devise a scheme by which she would retrieve the mighty golden fleece

and bring it home to King Aeëtes' palace
(she had alleged it was the sons of Phrixus
who dragged her off and gave her to the strangers
560as spoils of war). Making such false excuses,
she scattered on the airy breezes drugs
potent enough to lure a savage creature
down a precipitous cliff, even a creature
that happened to be very far away.

565Wretched Eros, great abomination,
great bane of humankind, from you arise
murderous feuds and groans and lamentations
and countless other miseries besides.
Great god, may you arise and shoot your arrows
570 (448)against the offspring of my enemies
just as you shot Medea's insides full
of cursed spite. How cruelly did she slaughter
Absyrtus, her own brother, when he came
to meet her? That's the next part of my song.

575After the heroes put the girl ashore,
according to the treaty, on the Isle
of Artemis, the parties separated
and beached their vessels on opposing shores,
and Jason chose an ambush to await
580Absyrtus first and his companions later.

The fatal promises deceived Absyrtus,
and he went sailing right away across the river
and landed in the darkest hour of night
upon the sacred isle. He started forth,
585 (459)without a guard, to learn his sister's mind
through conversation, as a little boy
dares sailing on a runoff-swollen torrent
not even adults would attempt. He hoped
that she would plot with him against the strangers.

590As they were settling the details, Jason
vaulted out of the leafy ambushade,
a naked sword-blade hefted in his hand.
The girl was quick to turn her eyes away
and veil them, so that she would not behold
595the coming deathblow and her brother's blood.

Think of a butcher slaughtering a bull,
a giant, big-horned bull—yes, that’s the way
that Jason struck the man. He had been lurking
beside the temple that the Brygians
600 (470) who live upon the mainland opposite
had built for Artemis. Knees buckling,
Absyrtus crumpled in the temple’s forecourt.
A hero gasping out his life, he caught,
in both his hands, the crimson geyser streaming
605 out of the wound and smeared his sister’s mantle
and silver veil as she recoiled from him.
A dauntless Fury watched it all, sidelong
and without sympathy—a putrid deed.

The son of Aeson, then, the hero, hacked off
610 the corpse’s limbs, three times imbibed its blood
and spat the taint out through his teeth three times,
as is the proper way for murderers
to purge perfidious assassination.
He stashed the sagging carcass in the earth,
615 (481) and to this day the bones are lying there
among a people known as the “Absyrtians.”

As soon as his companions saw before them
the glimmer of the torch the girl had raised
to signal them to come, they rowed the *Argo*
620 up alongside the Colchian ship and started
massacring all the men aboard it
as hawks descend upon a flock of doves,
or savage lions, when they reach the fold,
pounce on a teeming flock of huddled sheep.
625 They overwhelmed them like a conflagration,
slaughtered them—none of them escaped destruction.
Jason returned at last to join the battle,
but his companions needed no assistance;
rather, they had been worrying for him.

630 (492) When they were done, they all sat down to form
some prudent plan about their journey home.
Medea joined in the deliberations,
but Peleus was first to speak his mind:

“I say that right now while the night remains
635 we climb aboard and row in the direction

opposite to the one that they are watching.
At dawn, when they discover what has happened,
I doubt that anyone among them urging
further pursuit of us will win support.
640 Like any people orphaned of a leader,
they will be rent by nasty factions. Then,
after their forces are divided, we shall find
safe passage when we come back later on.”

So he proposed, and all the young men cheered
645 (503) the words of Peleus. They leapt aboard
without delay and labored at the oars
relentlessly until they reached the farthest
island in the chain, divine Electris,
right next to the Eridanus’ mouth.

650 Soon as the Colchians saw their leader dead,
they swore to hunt the *Argo* and the Minyans
across the whole wide Cronian Sea. But Hera
checked them with horrifying lightning flashes.
Finally, then, since they had come to loathe
655 their homes in the Cytaean land and dread
Aeëtes’ savage temper, they divided
and sailed to settlements by separate routes.
Some landed on the very islands where
the heroes had been beached. They live there yet
660 (515) under the name they took from Prince Absyrtus.
Others settled near the deep and brackish
Illyrian River, where Harmonia
and old King Cadmus share a common tomb.
(Thus they were neighbors to the Encheleians.)
665 Still others settled in the mountain chain
known as “Ceraunian” (or “Thundering”),
because the thunderbolts of Cronian Zeus
frightened them from the island opposite.

Once their homeward journey seemed secure,
670 the heroes coasted back and bound the hawsers
to the Hyllaeon land. The islands here
are packed in tight and jut so from the mainland
that it is hard for helmsmen to avoid them.
The local tribesmen, though, were kind. They helped
675 (528) the heroes navigate the strait and earned
a tripod of Apollo in return.

You see, when Jason went to holy Pytho
to ask about the quest, Apollo gave him
two tripods to be kept aboard the ship
680throughout the journey he would undergo.
According to the oracle, no hostile
forces would ever occupy a land
that kept one of these sacred tripods in it.
Thus, even to this day, the tripod stands
685close to the friendly citadel of Hyllus,
but underground, so that it will remain
forever out of sight.

The heroes, though,
did not find Hyllus still among the living—
Hyllus, whom shapely Melita had borne
690 (539) to Heracles among the Phaeacians.
Heracles, you see, had come to visit
Nausithoös' court and Macris, nurse
of Dionysus, to expunge the ghastly
murder of his own children from his hands.
695 And there it was he coveted and conquered
the daughter of the river god Aegaeus,
the water spirit Melita, who bore
Hyllus the Strong.

When Hyllus came of age,
he chafed beneath Nausithoös' rule
700 and wished no longer to reside beneath it.
So, after gathering from among the natives
a crew of Phaeacian journeymen,
he sailed into the Cronian Sea. (In fact,
the hero-king Nausithoös had helped him
705 (550) outfit the voyage.) Hyllus settled here,
and the Mentores killed him as he fought
to keep a grazing herd of cattle from them.

Come, tell me, goddesses, how is it that,
beyond the Adriatic Sea, off near
710 Ausonia and the Ligystian islands
known as the Stoechades, such mighty
proof of the *Argo's* route can still be found?
What great necessity, what wants and needs,
drove them so far abroad? What winds conveyed them?

715 After the brutal slaughter of Absyrtus,
Zeus himself, the King of the Immortals,

succumbed to wrath against the perpetrators.
He ruled that they must purge themselves of bloodguilt
under the guidance of Aeaeian Circe
720 (561) and then endure ten thousand miseries
before returning home. None of the heroes
knew of this verdict, no, they simply left
Hyllaea and went speeding on their way.

Soon they had left all the Liburnian islands,
725 one by one, behind them in their wake,
Issa, Dysceladus, fair Pityeia—
islands that lately had been full of Colchians.
Then they passed Corcyra where Poseidon
settled the fair-haired daughter of Asopus,
730 Corcyra, far, far from the land of Phlius
from which the god had snatched her up in love.
Sailors who see it from the sea, all wooded
and somber, call it Dark Corcyra.

Next,

cheered by a balmy breeze, they passed Melita,
735 (573) sheer Cerossus, then, much farther on,
Nymphaea where the queen Calypso lived,
Atlas' daughter. They would soon have seen
the misty mountains of Ceraunia,
but Hera turned her thoughts toward Zeus' verdict
740 and heavy penalty. To force the heroes
onto the necessary course, she roused
storm winds, which fastened on the ship and pushed it
back to the rocky island of Electris.

Next thing they knew, as they were dashing backward,
745 one of the *Argo's* beams, the one Athena
had chopped out of an oak tree in Dodona
and fitted as the *Argo's* keel, emitted
a human voice, a warning. Holy dread
possessed them when they heard the voice proclaiming
750 (585) Zeus' terms—to wit, that they would never
survive the long sea paths and fierce sea squalls
unless the goddess Circe washed away
their cruel assassination of Absyrtus.

What's more, it told the brothers Polydeuces
755 and Castor to beseech the gods to grant
safe passage into the Ausonian Sea
where they must stop and visit Circe, daughter
of Helios and Persa. So the *Argo*

cried through the night. Tyndareus' sons
760arose and raised their hands to the immortals,
praying, *Please, may all this come to pass*,
though grief had gripped the other Minyan heroes.

The ship dashed onward under sail and reached
the halfway point on the Eridanus
765 (598)where Phaëthon, chest smitten by a flashing
lightning bolt, fell, half-incinerated,
out of the chariot of Helios
into the river muck, and to this day
foul vapors rising from the smoldering wound
770bubble out of the brackish slick. No bird
can pass on flapping wings above that fen,
no, they all catch fire and drop midflight.

Hidden in lofty poplars there, sad maidens,
the Heliades, raise sorrowful laments
775and from their eyelids gleaming drops of amber
fall to the sand. The sunlight dries them there.
Then, when a strong wind heaves the current over
its banks, the flood tide rolls them, hardened balls
of amber, into the Eridanus.

780 (611)The Celts, who give a variant of the story,
claim that the tears the rapids sweep along
are really those that Leto's son Apollo
shed many years before, when Zeus was angry
over the boy that beautiful Coronis
785bore to Apollo, next to the Amyrus,
on gleaming Lacerea. Riled in turn,
Apollo spurned the sky and stayed awhile
among the holy Hyperborean tribes.
Such is the story told among the Celts.

790The heroes felt no thirst or hunger there,
nor did their minds think happy thoughts. No, rather,
all day burdened with the noxious stench,
they tired and sickened. The Eridanus
and all its streams were boiling off the vapors
795 (623)of Phaëthon's still smoldering corpse—
unbearable. All night the heroes heard
the Heliades lamenting his demise,
weeping and weeping, and their tears went drifting

downstream like little drops of oil.

From there

800they crossed into the deeply flowing Rhône.

Here, where it marries the Eridanus,
enemy roars contend. The Rhône, you see,
starts at the farthest outskirts of the earth
where Night's portcullis and embankments stand.

805Part of it flows into the River Ocean,
part empties into the Ionian Sea,
and part goes rushing out through seven mouths
into a large bay off Sardinia.

While on the Rhône, they crossed into a chain
810 (635)of stormy lakes that pock the vast, unmeasured
plains of the Celts. They almost met with shameful
destruction there because a tributary
was trending off into the Gulf of Ocean,
and they, in ignorance, resolved to take it.

815They never would have gotten out alive.
But Hera leapt from heaven just in time
and shrieked *turn back!* from a Hercynian peak,
and all the heroes trembled at the cry,
so ominously did the vast sky echo.

820So, with divine assistance, they reversed
their course and found a route to take them home.

A good long slog, and they had reached at last
a beach and ocean breakers, after passing,
unchallenged, through a thousand tribes of Celts
825 (647)and Ligyans, and all because of Hera—
she poured impenetrable mist around them
all the days they traveled on the river.

They coasted out the fourth mouth of the seven
and beached safely amid the Stoechades,
830thanks to the sons of Zeus—this is the reason
altars and rites were founded here to honor
the two of them forever. They were not
to serve as saviors only on that voyage,
but Zeus bestowed on them the privilege
835of saving future sailors' vessels, too.

Once past the Stoechades, the heroes reached
the island of Aethalia and there,

exhausted, scrubbed away their scum of sweat
with pebbles, and the pebbles on that beach
840 (657)are fleshy colored to this very day.
Their discuses of stone and marvelous tackle
are still there also, and the site is named
The *Argo's* Anchorage because of them.

From there they sailed swiftly through the heaving
845Ausonian Sea with the Tyrrhenian coast
in view beside them. After they arrived
at the illustrious harbor of Aeaëa,
they tied the lines up at the nearest shore.
And there was Circe in the sea spray washing
850her hair because a dream had troubled her.

During the night it seemed that all the walls
and chambers of her house were dripping blood,
and flames were eating up the cache of drugs
with which she had, up to that time, bewitched
855 (668)whoever came to visit. She herself
had quenched the flames with sacrificial blood
and so recovered from her horrid fright.

And that was why she rose at dawn and went
to wash her hair and clothing in the surf.
860And there were beasts around her that resembled
neither carnivorous animals nor humans
in any normal way but some mélange
of limbs from each. These creatures followed Circe,
as flocks of sheep in countless numbers follow
their shepherd from the fold.

865Long, long ago,
before dry weather had solidified
the soil, before, as well, it had received
moisture enough beneath the arid sun,
Earth made this sort of thing all on her own,
870 (680)a kind with mixed-up limbs, out of the slime.
And Time, then, sorted out and reassembled
the animals at long last into species.
Crossed like those ancient creatures, the amorphous
monsters of Circe followed in her train.
875Boundless amazement overcame the heroes,
and when they gazed on Circe's skin and eyes,
they knew at once she was Aëëtes' sister.

When she had cleansed the terror of her nightmares,
she turned homeward and bade the heroes follow
880 by slyly stroking them as she went by.
The crew, however, at a nod from Jason,
remained behind, and he alone escorted
the Colchian maiden, and the two of them
followed the path until they reached the palace.
885 (692) Though Circe was disturbed by their arrival,
she bade them rest at ease on polished chairs.
They sprinted to the hearth, though, without speaking
and sat there, in accordance with the customs
that rule the rueful rites of supplication.
890 Medea hid her beauty in her hands,
and Jason plunged straight down into the floor
the sword with which he killed Aeëtes' son,
and they did not lift up their eyes and look
upon the goddess. Thus she knew, straight off,
895 their lot was exile and their crime kin-murder.

So, in accordance with the rites of Zeus
the God of Suppliants who, on the one hand,
mightily despises murderers
and, on the other, mightily defends them,
900 (702) she made the sacrifice required to cleanse
the suppliants sitting, tainted, at her hearth:

First, to expunge the deed's contamination,
Circe picked out and held above their heads
the offspring of a swollen-uddered sow.
905 Then, opening the piglet's throat, she lathered
Jason's and Medea's hands with blood.
A second time with different libations
she made an offering to Zeus Purgation,
the last defense of suppliant homicides.
910 The Naiad slaves who served her every need
then whisked the toxic stuff out of the palace.
Circe herself beside the hearth fire offered
wineless libations and devotional cakes
as gifts to soothe the dogged Furies' rage
915 (715) and soften Zeus to leniency, regardless
of whether they implored his grace with hands
tainted by foreign or familial blood.

When she had finished with the expurgation,

she told them they could rise, then seated them
920 on polished chairs and took a seat before them.
She was the first to speak, inquiring all
about their quest, its purpose and the place
from which they came to seek her land and palace,
and why they had collapsed beside her hearth.
925 The troubling specifics of her nightmare
recurred to her as she assessed the couple.
What's more, she had been eager to discover
their language ever since the maiden first
lifted her gaze up from the ground. You see,
930 (727) all of the sun god Helios' descendants
are easy to identify because
their radiant eyes emit a light like gold.

All earnestness, Aeëtes' daughter answered
each of her questions in the Colchian tongue.
935 She told her of the heroes' quest and travels,
how they had toiled in the awful contest,
how she had erred by heeding her distracted
sister, and how, among the sons of Phrixus,
she had escaped her father's dreadful threats.
940 She left the murder of Absyrtus out
but Circe, all the same, surmised the crime,
pitied her sobbing niece and said:

"Poor wretch!

Look what a scandalous, obscene elopement
you have devised. No, I do not expect
945 (740) you will escape Aeëtes' brutal rage
for long. He shortly will be hunting even
the citizens of Hellas to avenge
his son's assassination. It was you
who perpetrated those appalling crimes.

950 Still, since you are my niece and at my knees,
I shall refrain, now that you're here, from making
further trouble for you. Go on, now.
Please leave my home and take this stranger with you—
whoever he might be that you have taken,
955 against your father's wishes, as your own.
Don't bother sitting at my hearth again
and supplicating me for help, because
your reckless schemes and impudent elopement
are things of which I never shall approve."

960 (749) So Circe scolded, and insufferable
agony gripped the girl. She pulled a robe
over her eyes and poured forth liquid grief
until the hero took her by the hand
and led her, quivering, across the threshold.
965 And so they made their way from Circe's palace.

Cronian Zeus' wife had not been left
unbriefed of their departure. Iris saw them
leave the palace and informed her mistress,
Hera, who had commanded her to note
970 when they departed for the ship, and Hera
gave Iris fresh instructions:

"Iris darling,
if ever in the past you have performed
my bidding, set out on your rapid wings
and summon Thetis up out of the sea
975 (759) to join me here. I have a need of her.
Next, travel to the shores where heavy hammers
pound the big bronze anvils of Hephaestus.
Tell him to pacify his fiery forges
until the heroes' ship has passed them. Next,
980 find Aeolus, who regulates the gales,
those naughty children of the upper air,
and give him my instructions: he must temper
all the winds of heaven so that not
the slightest breeze disturbs the sea, except
985 a kind west wind, until the heroes reach
Alcinoös' Phaeacian kingdom."

So she commanded. Iris flew at once
down from Olympus on extended wings,
tapered and glided into the Aegean
990 (772) just over Nereus' deep-sea palace.
To execute the first of her three tasks
she swam in search of Thetis and delivered
the message, just as Hera had instructed,
to call the sea nymph up to talk with her.
995 Next, Iris paid a visit to Hephaestus
and told him to desist forthwith from swinging
his iron hammer. Then at last she reached
Aeolus, famous son of Hippotas.
While she was giving him the news and resting
1000 her swift knees from her travels, Thetis left

Nereus and her sisters, swam, then flew
up to Olympus and the goddess Hera,
and Hera offered her a seat and said:

“Hear, goddess Thetis, what I want to tell you.

1005 (784) You know how highly Jason and his comrades
rate in my love. You know I pushed them safely
through the Clashing Rocks, when forks of fire
were violently thundering above them
and waves were boiling round the jagged headlands.

1010 Now their journey leads them past imposing
Cape Scylla and Charybdis’ eruptions.

But listen. Ever since you were an infant,
I myself have nursed and cherished you
more than the other ocean goddesses

1015 because you never dared to go to bed
with Zeus, though he was sorely yearning for it—
yes, he has always had his love affairs
with mortals and immortals, too. But you
were fearful in your thoughts because you so . . .
esteemed me.

1020 (798) Though he swore a mighty oath:

Never would you be called the wife of god,
he never did abstain from leering at you—
against your will, of course—no, not until
venerable Themis told him what would happen,
1025 how it was fated you would bear a son
mightier than his father. So at last
he gave you up, for all of his desire,
so that no one would be his match and rule
the gods in lieu of him, but he would keep
his empery forever.

1030 So I gave you
the finest of the mortals for a husband
so that you might enjoy a heartfelt wedding
and bear a child. I summoned all the gods
down for the wedding feast, and I myself
1035 (809) held up the bridal torch in my own hands
to pay you for the kind esteem you gave me.

Now let me tell the truth about the future:
your son—the one the Naiads now are nursing
in Centaur Cheiron’s cave, the one who wants
1040 his mother’s milk—that very son of yours

will come one day to the Elysian Fields,
and it is fated that he wed Medea,
Aeëtes' daughter, there. Mother-in-law,
therefore, protect your son's betrothed-to-be,
1045along with Peleus. Why do you hold
so fixed a grudge against him? He was foolish,
but folly sometimes blinds immortals, too.

I am quite confident that on my orders
Hephaestus will desist awhile from stoking
1050 (820)his forges to a rage, and Aeolus
the son of Hippotas will check the gusts
of rushing winds, that is, except for Zephyr,
until they reach the Phaeacian harbor.
You must guarantee the men safe passage.

1055My worst fears are the rocks and toppling waves,
but you can foil them with your sisters' help.
Prevent my friends from plunging, through ineptness,
into Charybdis—she would suck them down
and keep them there. Also be sure they skirt
1060the loathsome lair of Ausonian Scylla,
fell Scylla, whom the prowling goddess known
sometimes as Hecate, sometimes Crataeis,
conceived from Phorcys. Mind their course or else
this fiend will swoop down with her horrid maws
1065 (831)and gobble up the finest of my heroes.
Yes, guide the *Argo* so that they escape,
if only by a hairsbreadth, their demise.”

Such were the queen's commands, and Thetis answered:

“If all the gales and furious lightning flashes
1070do, in fact, relent, then I assure you
I will be bold and push the ship through safely,
even if waves arise to check its progress,
so long as Zephyr keeps on stiffly blowing.

It's time for me to go and make my long,
1075long, indescribable journey through the sea
to ask my sisters' help. Then I shall swim
to where the ship's stern cables have been fastened
so that the heroes at the break of dawn
will turn their thoughts again toward sailing home.”

1080 (842) With that, the goddess plummeted from heaven
and splashed into the churning dark-blue waves
to summon all her sister Nereids.
They heard and, when they were assembled, Thetis
delivered Hera's orders and at once
1085 deployed them all to the Ausonian Sea.
Then she herself, more rapid than a glint
of light or sunbeam clearing the horizon,
shot through the depths until she reached Aeaea
on the Tyrrhenian coast. She found the heroes
1090 beside the *Argo*, playing skip-the-stone
and shooting arrows. Thetis on the sly
came close and squeezed the hand of Peleus
son of Aeacus, since he was her husband.
None of the others could perceive her, no,
1095 (855) she showed herself to him alone. She told him:

"No longer rest on the Tyrrhenian coast
but loose the cables of your speedy ship
at dawn—thus you will be obeying Hera,
your helper, since it is at her command
1100 the maiden Nereids have all assembled
to guard your ship and guide it safely through
the rocks they call the Ever-Floating Islands,
because that is your fated route. But you—
when you perceive me coming with my sisters,
1105 do not divulge my presence to your comrades,
no, keep it quiet or you will enrage me
still more than when your reckless shout enraged me."

So she explained and plunged into the depths,
and withering sorrow seized on him because
1110 (867) his wife had never paid a visit to him
since she had first bereaved his bed and bedroom—
their son, the great Achilles, then an infant,
had been the reason for her anger.

Thetis,
you see, was burning off his mortal nature
1115 each night within the hearth fire and by day
rubbing his tender body with ambrosia
to make him an immortal and prevent
grotesque old age from ravaging his body.
Peleus, though, leapt out of bed one night,
1120 spotted his dear son writhing in the flames

and raised a frightening cry—the fool.

When Thetis

heard him, she snatched the baby up and hurled him,
screaming, onto the ground, and she herself,
her body like a breeze or dream, went swiftly
1125 (878) out of the palace, jumped into the sea,
and never came back home to him. That's why
mute helplessness had bound and gagged his thoughts.
Nevertheless, he brought himself to tell
all Thetis' instructions to his comrades.

1130 They stopped at once and set aside their games.
Then, after building fires and strewing leaf beds
along the beach, they dined and slept the night
as usual.

When day-reviving Dawn

had lightened heaven's rim, a swift west wind
1135 arose with her, and they embarked and mounted
the rowing benches. Quickly, then, they weighed
the anchor stone and set the gear in order.
Once under sail, they used the sheets to pull
the canvas taut, and stiff winds drove the *Argo*
onward.

1140 (892) Soon they spotted Anthemousa,

the gorgeous island where the clear-voiced Sirens,
daughters of Acheloös, sang sweet songs
to lure in and ruin every sailor
who passed their shores. Shapely Terpsichore,
1145 a Muse, once bedded down with Acheloös
and bore them to him. Ages back, the Sirens
had waited on Demeter's noble daughter
and sang their odes to her while she was still
unmarried. Now, though, they appeared part bird,
part maiden to the eyes.

1150 Always on lookout

from their attractive-harbored roost, they often
seduced seamen from honeyed homecomings
by withering them with languidness. And so,
without delay, and this time to the heroes,
1155 (903) the Sirens hurled lilylike contraltos
out of their mouths. The heroes would already
have run aground if Orpheus of Thrace,
son of Oeagrus, hadn't taken up
his lyre, set his fingers to the strings,

1160and strummed the rhythm of a lively march
so that their ears were buzzing with a rival
and upbeat song. And so the lyre's vibrations
overpowered all those virgin voices.

Zephyr and the resounding ocean waves
1165rose up astern and swept the vessel onward,
and soon the Sirens' song was less distinct.
Nevertheless, alone of his companions,
Boutes the noble son of Teleon
leapt from his sanded bench into the sea
1170 (914)because the Sirens' clear-toned notes had melted
his spirit, and he swam through somber surges,
unlucky soul, toward shore. They would have snatched
his homecoming away right then and there
if Cypris the Erycian Queen had not,
1175in pity, picked him up out of the eddies
and swept him safely to her seaside haven
at Lilybaeum.

So, with great regret,
the heroes left the Sirens. Other dangers
awaited them, however—ship-destroying
1180menaces at the crossroads of the seas:
Scylla appeared atop her sea-washed headland
on one side; on the other hoarse Charybdis
was gurgling and coughing water up.

Not far from them, the Ever-Floating Islands
1185 (925)were booming as the mighty sea swell struck them.
Not long before, their summits had been venting
blazes of fire above the liquid rock,
and smoke so choked the atmosphere that one
could not have spotted daylight. Then, although
1190Hephaestus had retired from the forge,
the sea was still emitting bursts of steam.
The Nereids assembled at this spot
from all directions to assist the heroes,
and then the goddess Thetis gripped the *Argo*
1195and steered it through the Ever-Floating Islands.

As dolphins during tranquil weather rise
out of the depths and swim about a ship,
starboard, astern, larboard, and at the prow,
a joy for sailors, so the Nereids

1200 (937)emerged and synchronized their circulations
while Thetis steered the course. Then, when the men
were just about to hit the Floating Islands,
Nereus' daughters hiked their skirts
above their gleaming knees, clambered atop
1205the rocks protruding from the froth of surf,
and stood in two lines, one on either side.
The current rocked the ship starboard and larboard,
and all around the heroes ruthless breakers
were vaulting and exploding on the rocks,
1210which were like cliff walls towering above them.
Now would the ship have broken up and sunk
to the abysmal bottom of the sea,
and rough waves soon would have been churning fathoms
above the wreck.

Imagine maidens standing
1215 (948)upon a sandy shoreline, how they roll
their gowns up to their waists, pick up a ball,
toss it around or high into the air
so that it never hits the ground—that's how
the Nereids passed the ship to one another,
1220keeping it in the air, above the breakers,
always above the rocks, and all the while
sea spray kept shooting up around the heroes.

Mighty Hephaestus stood atop a cape
of sea-scoured stone, his brawny shoulder leaning
1225against a hammer's haft, to watch them. Hera
stood there in radiant heaven watching them
and even threw her arms around Athena,
so wrenching was the frightful sight she saw.
So long as springtime stretches out the day,
1230 (962)the sea nymphs worked at portaging the *Argo*
over the roaring rocks until its sail
picked up the wind and pulled the heroes onward.

Once they had reached the meadows of Thrinacria
where Helius' cattle graze and grow,
1235the Nereids like sea mews plunged asunder
because they had fulfilled the will of Hera.
Then, through the mist, the bleats of sheep arose,
and lows, the lows of cattle, struck their ears.
There she was—Helius' youngest daughter
1240Phaethousa strolling round a dewy meadow,

a shepherdess attending to her sheep
with silver staff in hand, while Lampeteia,
her cowherd sister, kept a drove in line
by brandishing a copper prod. The heroes
1245 (975) could see the cattle feeding on the lowlands
and flats beside the river—none of them
were darkly colored, no, they all were white
as milk and glorying in golden horns.

They passed the island in the daylight hours
1250 and cleaved the billows in a cheerful mood
all night, till Dawn the Early Riser cast
her beams athwart their course. There is an island,
a curved one, facing the Ionian strait
in the Ceraunian Sea, its topsoil thick
1255 and bountiful. Beneath the island lies
the sickle that, as ancient legends tell us—
Muses, forgive me since I tell this story
out of necessity—the Titan Cronus
ruthlessly hacked his father's privates off.
1260 (987) Others have claimed it is the scythe that served
Demeter, goddess of the Underworld,
who lived upon the island once and taught
the Titans how to harvest ears of grain.
The island, therefore, has been called Drepana
1265 or "Scythe," the nursemaid of the Phaeacians,
and all of its inhabitants are sprung
from Ouranus' blood.

The heroes rode

a gale wind in from the Thrinacrian Sea
and landed there, constrained by great exhaustion.
1270 Alcinoös and all his people greeted
their coming warmly and with sacrifices.
The whole town reveled, and you would have thought
that they were toasting their own sons' return.
The heroes felt as happy meeting them
1275 (1000) as if they had regained Haemonia.
Soon, though, they drew their swords and raised the
war cry—
in ranks before them stood a countless host
of Colchians who had passed the Pontic mouth
and Clashing Rocks to apprehend the heroes.
1280 They swore that they would either seize the girl
immediately or raise the battle cry

and fight to win their claim both then and there
and in the future once their king arrived.

But King Alcinoös restrained their zeal
1285to start a battle. He preferred to settle
the troublesome dispute without both sides
embracing war. All in a killing fear,
the maiden pleaded time and time again
with Jason and his men and grasped the knees
1290 (1013)of King Alcinoös' wife Arete:

"Queen, I beseech you, please have pity on me.
Do not surrender me unto the Colchians
to carry to my father. Please do not
be one among the race of humankind
1295whose minds by minor errors tumble rashly
into disaster—so my mind went tumbling . . .
but no, no, it was not because of lust.
Let Helius' sacrosanct resplendence
and the unspoken rites of Perses' daughter,
1300the Nighttime Walker, vouch for the duress
under which I eloped with all these men.
Fear, it was dreadful fear that made me think
of running off when I had gone astray.
No way around elopement could be found.

1305 (1024)My virgin belt remains as innocent
and undefiled as in my father's palace.
Pity me, lady, and convince your husband.
So may the gods bestow on you a perfect
life, and renown, and children, and the glory
1310of an eternally unconquered city."

So with a flood of tears she begged Arete
and then approached, in turn, her friends the heroes:

"Because of you, O mightiest men of all,
because of your affairs, I now am sunk
1315in desperation. It was with my help
you yoked the bulls and reaped the fatal crop
of earthborn soldiers. Thanks to me, you shortly
will sail away to bring the golden fleece
back to Haemonia. And here I am,
1320 (1036)bereft of country, parents, home, and all

life's pleasures, while I have restored to you
your homes and homeland, and your honeyed eyes
will gaze again upon your parents. No,
some grievous god has ripped those pleasures from me,
1325and I am wandering the sea with strangers,
a derelict. Beware your oaths and vows;
beware the Fury who avenges suppliants;
beware the gods' resentment when I tumble
into Aeëtes' hands and perish piecemeal
1330under unending agony and torture.

There stand before me in defense no temples,
no guardian towers, no battlements, but you,
just you alone, men ruthless in their coldness,
wretches who suffer not a hint of shame
1335 (1048)on seeing me, a helpless little girl,
embrace the knees of an exotic queen.

When you were burning to acquire the fleece,
you would have rushed to join your spears in battle
against the Colchians and proud Aeëtes.
1340Now you forget your courage, though these men
are all alone and far from reinforcements."

So she exclaimed and begged, and every man
she supplicated tried to hearten her
and soothe her misery. They drew their swords,
1345brandished their sharply whetted spears, and swore
that they would not hold back from saving her
if she should meet with an unlucky judgment.

Night, though, the rest from labors, soon subdued
the weary men and stilled the whole wide world.
1350 (1060)Slumber, however, never reached the girl,
but anguish churned her heart, as when a poor,
hardworking woman twirls and twirls her spindle
all night long, and all around her wail
the children orphaned since her husband died,
1355and tears drip down her cheeks as she considers
the miserable lot she has been given.
Like hers, Medea's cheeks were wet with weeping
and her heart kept spinning, spinning, spun
by agonizing pangs.

Back in the city

1360 Alcinoös and his respected wife
Arete lay in bed within the palace,
talking about the maiden late at night.
As women do when managing their husbands,
she addressed him intimately:

“Darling,

1365 (1073) please do something for me. Please preserve
this girl of many worries from the Colchians
and do, thereby, the Minyans a favor.

Argos and the people of Haemonia
live closer to our island, and Aeëtes
1370 does not at all live near. In fact, we know
nothing of this Aeëtes, only hearsay.
The maiden, though, has undergone harsh trials;
her pleas have split my heart in two. Therefore,
do not, my lord, release her to the Colchians
1375 to drag away back to her father’s palace.
Yes, she was mad with folly when she gave
Jason the magic drug to beat the oxen.
Yes, she fled her ruthless father’s wrath,
trying to cure one error with another,
1380 (1082) as people often do with a mistake.
Still, I have heard that Jason since that time
has taken mighty oaths to marry her
in proper legal fashion at his palace.

My love, do not then stubbornly compel
1385 Jason to break his oath, nor let the father
inflict unending torture on his daughter,
if you can stop it. Parents can oppress
their children overmuch. Consider what
Nycteus did to fair Antiope
1390 and what afflictions Danaë endured
at sea through her own father’s wickedness.
In fact, not long ago or far away,
that wicked king Echetus jabbed bronze brooches
into his daughter’s eyeballs. Now she labors
1395 (1095) under a grievous fate, forever grinding
grains of bronze in an unlighted dungeon.”

So she pleaded, and the king’s heart softened
under his wife’s persuasion. He replied:

“Arete, I could have my soldiers scatter
1400the Colchians as a favor to the heroes,
and all for that girl’s sake, but I am loath
to disrespect the stringent laws of Zeus.
Nor is it wise to disregard Aeëtes,
as you propose. No one alive is more
1405kingly than King Aeëtes. If he wanted,
he could bring war down on Hellas, even
from far away. Therefore, I must deliver
a judgment that will seem disinterested
in all men’s eyes. But I will not conceal it
1410 (1106)from you: I shall command the Colchians
to bring the girl back home if she is still
a virgin. But if she is not a virgin,
I shall not divide her from her husband
nor shall I yield unto her enemies
1415the child she may be bearing in her womb.”

So he disclosed and went to sleep at once.
His wife, though, stored his wisdom in her heart,
rose from her bed, and hurried through the palace,
and all her serving ladies rushed together
1420to wait on her. She whispered for a herald
and sent a message, prudently advising
the son of Aeson to deflower the girl
and not risk pleading with Alcinoös.
And she revealed her husband would deliver
1425 (1117)the following judgment to the Colchians:
that, *If Medea has remained a virgin,
he will dispatch her to her father’s home;
but if she has been sleeping with a husband,
he will not divide connubial love.*

1430So she reported, and the herald’s feet
whisked him out of the palace to deliver
Arete’s favorable news to Jason,
along with good Alcinoös’ verdict.
The messenger directly found the heroes
1435sitting under arms and keeping watch
beside the city in the port of Hyllus.
He told them everything, and his report
so pleased them that their spirits grew ecstatic.

Frantically, then, they mixed wine in a bowl

1440 (1129)to offer the immortals, as is proper,
and duly dragged sheep to the sacred altar.
Yes, that very night they made the maiden
a bridal bed within the sacred cave
where Macris once had lived.

She was the daughter
1445of Aristeaus, lord of honey. He
it was who first invented apiculture
and olive pressing, after much hard work.
Off in Abantian Euboea, Macris,
his daughter, was the first nursemaid to hold
1450Zeus' Nysaeon son up to her bosom.
She also wet his holy lips with honey
once Hermes had retrieved him from the flames.
Hera had seen her, though, and out of spite
exiled her from the island. Macris, then,
1455 (1140)went off and settled in this sacred cave
and gave the Phaeacians great abundance.

They laid a mighty mattress in the cave
and spread the glinting golden fleece upon it
so that the wedding would be more distinctive
1460and memorable in song. The nymphs collected
colorful flowers and brought them in protruding
from their resplendent bosoms. Over them
a glimmer as of fire was flickering,
so scintillating was the light that issued
1465out of the golden wool. It sparked sweet yearning
in all their eyes, but modesty restrained
each of the nymphs, in spite of her desire,
from reaching out and fondling the fleece.

The nymphs had come from various places: some were
1470 (1149)daughters of the Aegaeus River, others
were dwellers on the peak of Melita,
and others wood nymphs from the tablelands.
Hera herself, the wedded wife of Zeus,
had summoned them to pay respects to Jason,
1475and to this day the grotto where the nymphs
laid out the sweetly fragrant sheets and married
Jason and Medea bears the name
Medea's Cave.

Meanwhile the heroes took
their spears in hand in case some gang of foemen

1480dashed upon them unforeseen. They also
garlanded their heads with leafy sprigs
and to the thrum of Orpheus' lyre
melodiously sang the wedding hymn
outside the entrance to the bridal chamber.
1485 (1161)Alcinoös' realm was not the place
where Jason son of Aeson had desired
to consummate the marriage, no, he rather
had hoped to do it in his father's palace
once he returned. The girl had hoped so, too.
1490Necessity, however, had compelled them
to make love then and there.

The truth is, we
the members of the woe-struck tribes of mortals
never tread the pathways to delight
with confidence. Some bitter anguish always
1495shambles along beside our happiness.
Thus, after Jason and Medea's souls
dissolved in sweet lovemaking, terror gripped them:
*Would King Alcinoös, in fact, deliver
the verdict Queen Arete had described?*

1500 (1170)Dawn had returned, and her ambrosial beams
scattered the dusky darkness from the sky.
The island beaches laughed, the dew-drenched pathways
laughed as they ran in from the distant plains,
and there was movement in the streets, the townsfolk
1505were stirring, and the Colchians were stirring
out on the farthest spit of Macris Island.

Alcinoös, in keeping with his promise,
went out to them at once to speak his mind
about Medea. In his hand he held
1510a golden staff, the staff of law, with which
he rendered rightful judgments to the people
throughout the city. Phaeacian nobles
marched behind him in their battle armor,
and women swarmed out of the city gate
1515 (1183)to see the heroes. Country folk as well
came in to hear Alcinoös because
Hera had made sure news was sent abroad.
One of them picked the best ram in his flock
and drove him there; another led a heifer
1520that had not yet been broken to the yoke;

still others set up mixing bowls for wine,
and the aroma wafted far and wide.

Women presented garments they had woven,
as women will, along with gifts of gold
1525and every sort of splendor customary
for newlyweds. They stood awhile admiring
the builds and faces of the famous heroes
and there among them Orpheus, tapping out
a merry tempo with a purple sandal
1530 (1195)while strumming something gorgeous on his lyre.
And when the heroes sang the wedding hymn
the Naiads sang as well, sometimes in answer,
sometimes a wholly separate part, while dancing
a cyclic dance, and in your honor, Hera,
1535because you were the one who put the thought
into Arete's mind to warn the couple
about Alcinoös' wise decision.

Once he had given his momentous verdict,
Alcinoös upheld it to the letter.
1540By then the consummation of the marriage
was widely known, but neither King Aeëtes'
grudging anger nor the fear of battle
swayed his mind, since he had bound both parties
by steadfast oaths to reverence his ruling.
1545 (1206)So, when the Colchians perceived appeals
were useless, and Alcinoös insisted
they either heed his word or keep their ships
far from his harbors, they were all so frightened
of King Aeëtes' threats that they entreated
1550Alcinoös to welcome them as allies.
They lived awhile among the Phaeacians
until some tribesmen from Ephyra called
the Bacchidae arrived and settled there
among them. So the Colchian soldiers picked up
1555and settled on the island opposite.
From there they moved, at destiny's behest,
to the Ceraunian hills of the Abantes
and then to Oricum and the Nesteians,
but all this happened many ages later.

1560 (1217)The shrines Medea founded in the precinct
of Nomian Apollo still receive

annual sacrifices to the Moirae
and nymphs. Alcinoös bestowed rich gifts
upon the Minyans at their departure,
1565and Queen Arete did the same. What's more,
she gave the girl twelve Phaeacian handmaids
out of the palace store to wait upon her.

They left Drepana on the seventh day.
A stiff, favorable wind arose from Zeus
1570that morning, and the ship was speeding onward
before the gale. Still, it was not their fate
to rest their feet upon Achaean land,
no, not until they suffered further, farther
away in distant Libya. Soon the heroes
1575 (1228)had left astern the Ambracian Gulf,
soon they had skirted, with their sails spread wide,
the Curetes' dominion and a string
of islands, the Echinades among them.

But, at the very moment when the land
1580of Pelops had arisen into view,
a dismal gust of wind out of the north
seized them midcourse and carried them away
across the Libyan Sea for nine whole nights
and nine whole days until they coasted deep
1585into the Syrtes. Any ship that hits them
never can sail back out to sea again.
Shallows are everywhere, and everywhere
tangles of bracken washed out of the depths.
The sea scurf passes over them in silence.
1590 (1240)The sand extends to the horizon. Nothing
that walks or flies is ever stirring there.

Over and over flood tides leave the mainland
and then come rushing back to drag salt water
across the sand. One of these tides abruptly
1595dropped the *Argo* so far up the beach
that little of the keel was still in water.
So all the heroes jumped out of the ship,
and sorrow struck them when they saw the sky
and the expanse of endless land extending,
1600just like the sky, into the endless distance.
No path, no herdsman's shelter, no oasis
appeared. A dead calm haunted everything.

They said to one another in despair:

“Where have the storm winds landed us? Where are we?

1605 (1251) If only we had laughed at deadly fear
and risked retreating back out through the Rocks
the way we came. It surely had been better
if we had gone against the will of Zeus
and died attempting something glorious.

1610 Now if the winds compel us to remain here
even a short time, what are we to do?
The coast of this vast land is too, too barren.”

So each of them exclaimed. Ancaeus even,
their helmsman, helpless to relieve their troubles,
1615 addressed them bleakly as they sat there grieving:

“I’m sorry—we must die a shameful death.
There’s no escaping this catastrophe.
Even if gale winds blow in from the land,
we’ve foundered on a desert. All the worst
1620 (1264) a mortal can endure is now before us.
However far I stare into the distance,
I see more ocean shallows, brackish water
ceaselessly washing over dull gray sand.
This holy vessel would have roughly foundered
1625 far from the beach, except the surf itself
swept it at high tide inland from the bay.
Now that the tide has drained back out again,
only a surf too thin for sailing laps
about us, lightly covering the sand.
1630 That’s why I say all hope of sailing home
is severed from us. Let some other man
display his skill. He’s welcome to sit down
and take the tiller if he wants to save us,
but Zeus, it seems, has no desire whatever
1635 (1276) to land us at our port of embarkation
in Hellas, even after all our efforts.”

So Ancaeus spoke and broke down weeping.
The men with nautical experience
agreed with his despair. All hearts were ice,
1640 all cheeks surrendering to sallowness.
Just as when people wander through a city
like breathless ghosts, awaiting their destruction

by war or plague or some relentless flood
that will erase the oxen's work afield,
1645and all because odd omens have been witnessed—
statues spontaneously sweating blood,
roars sounding, mouthless, from the holy groves—
and high noon only means more night in heaven,
and stars do not stop shining all day long,
1650 (1288)so did the heroes wander without purpose
along the endless shore.

A somber dusk
too soon came over them and, sadly, then,
they wrapped their arms around each other, wept,
and said good-bye, so that they each could then
1655go off alone, fall in the sand, and die.
They staggered off, each farther than the last,
to pick their final resting places. Heads
shrouded by their cloaks, they lay unnourished,
weakening, all night long, all day, awaiting
1660the most horrendous death imaginable.

The handmaids shuffled to a place apart
and clustered, wailing, round Aeëtes' daughter.
As unfledged nestlings chirrup desperately
when they have tumbled from a cliff-side nest,
1665 (1301)or swans release their dying proclamations
from banks along the gorgeous Pactolus,
and dew-drenched glades are echoing around them,
and, echoing, the river's handsome current,
so did the maidens loose their long blond hair,
1670drape it along the dust, and wail all night
a pitiful lament.

And now these men,
these heroes, would have left their lives behind
and no names, no renown for later men
to study, and their mission would have failed.
1675But, as they withered there in helplessness,
the local nymphs, the guardians of Libya,
took pity on them. Once upon a time,
these goddesses had come to tend Athena
after she leapt out of her father's head
1680 (1311)sublimely armed. These were the goddesses
who bathed her in the tide of Triton Lake.

The hour was noon. The sun's most cruel rays

were scorching Libya. These powers gathered
around the son of Aeson, and their fingers
1685gently tugged the mantle from his head.
He dropped his gaze out of respect for them,
but they were bright before him and addressed him,
terrified as he was, with soothing words:

“Unlucky fellow, why has feebleness
1690afflicted you? We know about your journey,
how you were questing for the golden fleece.
We know your labors, too, the mighty deeds
you have performed while wandering across
the land and sea. We are the Lonely Ones,
1695 (1323)daughters and guardians of Libya,
fluent in human utterance. Stand up now.
Stop grumbling and carrying on like this.
Go rouse your men. As soon as Amphitrite
unyokes Poseidon’s smooth-wheeled chariot,
1700you and your comrades must repay your mother
for all the pain she suffered bearing you
so long inside her womb, and you may yet
come to the holy country of Achaea.”

So they spoke and vanished in a flash
1705from where they had been standing, and their voices
faded away. But Jason started upright,
looked everywhere around him, and implored:

“Be kind, you noble powers of the dunes,
though I confess the meaning of your words
1710 (1334)about our journey home eluded me.
Still, I shall rouse my friends and tell them all
you told me in the hope that we can find
some sign to guide us out of this morass.
In counsel many men outdistance one.”

1715So he implored and leapt up, cloaked in dust
from head to foot. He shouted to his comrades
far into the distance, as a lion
wandering through a forest roars to summon
his mate, and even distant mountain valleys
1720tremble at the sound, and all the herdsmen
and oxen shake with fear. (But Jason’s cry
was not at all upsetting to his men

because it was the bellow of a friend
calling to friends.) The heroes gathered round him,
1725 (1345) their heads all hanging. Still, despite their sorrow,
he got the crew to sit beside the ship,
the women, too. He spoke among them, then,
telling them all that he had witnessed:

“Listen,
my friends: as I was lying in despair,
1730 three goddesses appeared to me, like maidens,
but clad in wild goatskin from neck to waist.
They gathered round my head, pulled off my cloak
with no unfriendly tug, and bade me rise
all on my own and wake you up to pay
1735 due recompense for all our mother suffered
while bearing us inside her womb so long.
This should be done whenever Amphitrite
unyokes Poseidon’s smooth-wheeled chariot.

I don’t quite grasp the holy mandate’s meaning.
1740 (1358) They said they were, in fact, divinities,
daughters and guardians of Libya.
What’s more, they claimed they had a thorough
knowledge
of what we have endured by land and sea.
Suddenly I could see them there no longer—
1745 some mist or cloud, it seemed, had hidden them
right in the middle of their apparition.”

So he explained, and they were all amazed.
Suddenly an extraordinary omen
appeared before the Minyans—a stallion,
1750 gigantic, monstrous, leapt from sea to land,
the mane golden and blowing round his neck.
After he shook the sea spray from his flanks,
he galloped off, his hoofbeats like the wind,
and Peleus exulted in the vision
1755 (1369) and cried into the crowd of his companions:

“I hereby do proclaim Poseidon’s wife
has just now loosed his chariot with her hands.
What’s more, our mother is the ship herself
because, indeed, she bears us in her womb
1760 and constantly endures the pains of labor.
Come, let us lift her with a hearty heave,

place her upon our unrelenting shoulders,
and lug her inland through the sand-choked waste
along the course the sprinting horse has shown us.
1765For surely he will not go plunging under
the earth. No, rather, I suspect his hoofprints
will point us toward a gulf that feeds the sea.”

So he proposed and everyone agreed
to heed his plan.

The Muses own this story.

1770 (1382)I sing at the Pierides’ command
and now shall tell precisely what they told me—
that you, by far the mightiest sons of kings,
with strength and courage heaved the *Argo* up
onto your shoulders, also everything
1775the ship had in it, and you lugged that burden
over the arid dunes of Libya
for twelve whole days and twelve whole nights. But who
could narrate all the pain and misery
they suffered at their task? Let no one doubt
1780they were descended from immortal gods,
so weighty was the chore they undertook
out of necessity. They felt as much joy
lugging that tonnage down the salty bank
to Triton Lake as they did reaching brine
1785 (1392)and easing *Argo* from their sturdy shoulders.

Then like wild dogs they all ran off
scavenging for a spring. Persistent thirst
weighed on them, many aches and sufferings.
Nor was their search in vain. They soon discovered
1790a sacred plain where only yesterday
the earthborn serpent Ladon had been guarding
pure-golden apples in the realm of Atlas
while the Hesperides, the local nymphs,
murmured delightful hymns to ease his watch.
1795But, by the time the heroes reached the spot,
Heracles had already shot the serpent.
There beneath the apple tree it sprawled.
Only its tapered tip was still in motion—
everything from the coils to the head
1800 (1405)lay lifeless. Flies had melted round the wounds
because the arrows had injected poison,
the acid taint of the Lernaean Hydra,

into its innards. The Hesperides
were nearby, with their silver hands held up
1805 before their golden faces, wildly keening
over the carcass.

When the heroes gathered
around the nymphs, they withered in an instant
and turned to dust. Orpheus recognized
the sacred sign and for his comrades' sake
1810 tried to appease the nymphs with winning words:

"Beautiful, gracious queens, divinities—
whether you rate among the goddesses
who live in heaven, dwell beneath the earth,
or bear the name of solitary nymphs,
1815 (1414) be kind to us and come, O powers, appear
before our longing eyes and point us, please,
either to where a spring escapes from rock
or where some freshet rises from the ground.
Please, please show us something to relieve
1820 the fiery torture of our thirst. I vow
that, if we ever make it home to Greece,
we shall reward you there as we reward
the foremost goddesses, with countless gifts,
feasts, and libations."

So he prayed to them,
1825 using a plaintive and beseeching voice.
They stood nearby invisibly and pitied
the heroes. First of all they made some grass
sprout from the sand and then, above the grass,
tall stalks arose and saplings soon enough
1830 (1427) stood where there had been dunes: Hespera turned
into a poplar, Erytheis an elm,
Aegla a venerable willow's trunk.
Then they emerged out of the trees and looked
just as they had before—prodigious wonders!
1835 Aegla addressed the men with gentle words
in answer to their looks of desperation:

"A mighty boon to you in your afflictions
already passed through here—a most rude man,
who soon deprived our guardian snake of life,
1840 picked all the goddess' pure-golden apples,
and went and left us here in grief and horror.
Yes, a man came yesterday, a man

most murderous in arrogance and bulk.
Eyes glowering beneath a savage brow,
1845 (1437) he was a brute without a trace of pity.
He wore around his bulk the raw, untreated
hide of a lion, held a sturdy bow
of olive wood and used it to dispatch
this creature here.

The fellow had arrived
1850 on foot and, like the other guests we've seen,
ablaze with thirst. He dashed about at random
in search of water, which, to tell the truth,
he wouldn't have discovered in the dunes . . .
save for that bedrock outcrop over there
1855 beside Lake Triton. Either on his own
or at some god's suggestion, he decided
to kick its base, and water gushed, full force,
out of the rupture. Leaning on his hands,
with chest pressed to the ground, he swilled colossal
1860 (1448) volumes out of the riven rock until,
bent forward like a grazing beast afield,
he had appeased his superhuman belly."

Such was the tale she told them, and they all
burst into joy and ran like mad until
1865 they reached the place where she had pointed out
the spring. Imagine ants, earth excavators,
a dense gathering of them, how they swarm
around a narrow crack, or flies perhaps,
how they collect en masse around a sweet
1870 droplet of honey with voracious lust—
that's how the heroes pushed in tight around
the spring they found there gushing from a rock.
Without a doubt someone among them, lips
dribbling, shouted joyously:

"Amazing!

1875 (1459) Even from far off, Heracles has saved
his friends when they were withering with thirst.
If only we could chance upon his footprints
while we are traveling across this land."

So they were saying, and the men best suited
1880 to find their absent comrade rose in answer
and headed off in separate directions
because the nighttime winds had stirred the sand

and wiped out Heracles' deep impressions.
Calais, Zetes—Boreas' sons—
1885took to their wings and sought him from the air.
Euphemus sprinted off on speed-blurred feet.
Lynceus set out fourth—he had the gift
of long-range sight. As for the fifth man, Canthus,
bravery and the gods' commandments urged him
1890 (1469)to learn, firsthand, where Heracles had last seen
Polyphemus offspring of Eilatus.
Yes, Canthus burned to ask what happened to him,
but Polyphemus had already founded
a glorious town among the Mysians
1895and later, longing for his home return,
set out across the continent to find
the Argo. When he reached the Chalybes
who live beside the sea, fate beat him down.
A monument was raised for him beneath
1900a tall white poplar, very near the sea.

The day the heroes searched for Heracles
Lynceus thought that he had maybe caught
sight of him, all alone and far away
on that interminable continent.
1905 (1479)Lynceus glimpsed him in the way one sees
(or thinks he sees) the moon behind the clouds.
So, once he had returned to his companions,
he broke the news that no one any longer
could hope of overtaking Heracles.
1910The others came back, too—swift-foot Euphemus
and both the sons of Thracian Boreas.
The hunt had come to nothing.

Then, O Canthus!,
the doom of death took hold of you in Libya.
After you stumbled on a flock at pasture,
1915the shepherd who was tending it could only
fight to defend the sheep you tried to steal
for your emaciated comrades. Yes,
he struck you with a stone and knocked you dead.
At least the man was not a slave but noble
1920 (1490)Caphaurus, grandson of Lycorian Phoebus
and the respected maiden Acacallis.
Minos packed this maiden off to Libya,
his own daughter though she was, because
she had conceived a child by Apollo.

1925 Their splendid offspring, known as Amphithemis
and also Garamas, then bedded down
with a Tritonian nymph, who bore him sons:
Nasamon and intractable Caphaurus
who beat down Canthus to protect his flock.

1930 Soon as the heroes found the corpse, Caphaurus
did not escape harsh vengeance at their hands.
Then they took up their fallen comrade's body,
trundled it back, and laid it in the earth
with sighs and tears. They also took the sheep.

1935 (1502) Then on the selfsame day relentless fate
claimed Mopsus, too, the scion of Ampycus.
No, he could not evade harsh destiny
for all of his prophetic prescience.

A person's death is fixed and unavoidable.

1940 There it was, lying in a sand dune, shunning
the midday heat—the lethal sort of asp.

Too sluggish on its own to sink its fangs
in accidental passersby, this breed

would never launch itself against a person

1945 who spotted it in time and backed away.

However, once it has injected black

poison into any of the breathing

creatures the life-supporting earth sustains,

the path to Hades is a cubit long.

1950 (1512) Yes, even if Apollo plied his drugs—
and may it not be sacrilege to say it—

death would still be certain once those fangs

had pumped their venom. When the godlike Perseus
(known to his mother as Eurymedon)

1955 flew over Libya to bring a king

the Gorgon's freshly severed head, the drops

of red-black blood that fell onto the ground

sprouted into this noxious breed of snake.

And Mopsus, well—he set his left foot down

1960 firmly upon the taper of its tail,

and it coiled up around his calf and shin

and tore some skin out of him when it bit.

Medea and her handmaids scampered off

in fear, but he, a hero, bravely stroked

1965 (1523) the open wound—the bite did not distress him

much at all, poor man. Already, though,
Slumber the Loosener of Limbs was spreading
beneath his skin. Deep darkness doused his vision.
Soon he had strewn his heavy arms and legs
1970 along the ground and grown cold helplessly.
Jason and his companions gathered round
and stood there gaping at his grim demise.
Not even for a short time after death
could he be left out in the sun because
1975 the toxin right away had started rotting
the flesh within him, and the hair all over
his body thawed and dribbled off the skin.
They hurried with their bronze-wrought spades to dig
a deep grave for the corpse, and everyone,
1980 (1534) females and males alike, tore out their hair
and mourned the man, the sorry way he died.
Then, after they had marched three times around
the body, and it had received full honors,
they raised a funerary mound above it.

1985 They boarded ship again and, with a wind
out of the south blowing across the sea,
sailed off to find a path out of the lake.
Hour after hour they lacked a course and drifted
idly the whole day through. As when a serpent
1990 wriggles, hissing, on its crooked way
to slip from under a ferocious noon
and squints all round, its slits aglint with flickers
like little streaks of fire, until it finds
a crack and glides into a burrow—so
1995 (1546) the *Argo* wandered for a long time seeking
a navigable outlet from the lake.
Orpheus then suggested they should lug
the tripod of Apollo off the ship
and set it on the shore, to leave a gift
2000 for any local power that might guide
their homeward journey. So they beached the ship
and placed Apollo's tripod on the sand,
and Triton, god of the unbounded ocean,
walked over, masquerading as a youth.
2005 He scooped a bit of mud up, formed a ball,
and gave it to them as a guest-gift, saying:

“Take this, my friends, since I don't have on hand

any appropriate gift to offer you.
Now, if you happen to be seeking outlets
2010 (1557) into the sea (as sailors often are
when traveling in lakes), I can direct you.
Poseidon is my father, and he schooled me
thoroughly in the pathways of the sea,
and I am regent of the beaches. Maybe,
2015 even in your own country far away,
you've heard about Eurypylus, a man
brought up in Libya, home of wild beasts."

Such was his greeting, and Euphemus held
his hands out gratefully and gave this answer:

2020 "If you, friend hero, are acquainted somewhat
with Apis and the Sea of Minos, please
help us by giving us an honest answer.
We wound up here by chance. After the northern
storm winds marooned us on this desert coast,
2025 (1568) we picked our vessel up, a heavy burden,
and lugged it overland until we reached
this giant lake, and we have no idea
where there is passage to the sea, so that
we may sail homeward round the land of Pelops."

2030 So he explained, and Triton stretched his hand out,
pointed toward a deep-blue estuary,
an outlet from the lake, and gave directions:

"There where the lake is calm and dark with depth,
a passage leads out to the sea. White breakers
2035 are churning there on one side and the other,
and there's a narrow channel set between them.
The effervescent sea beyond it stretches
past Crete to the exalted land of Pelops.
When you emerge among the open rollers,
2040 (1580) cleave to port and skirt the coast so long
as it is trending to the north. As soon as
the coast retreats and slopes the other way,
cut seaward, and your journey will be safe.
Proceed in joy. As for the work involved,
2045 there should be no complaints when limbs endowed
with youthfulness are toiling at a task."

So, in a friendly way, he gave directions,
and they embarked at once, giddy to row
out of the lake at last. As they were speeding
2050eagerly onward, Triton seized the tripod
and seemed to disappear into the lake,
so swiftly did he vanish with the gift.
Their hearts exulted at the hopeful omen—
a blessed god had stopped to aid their journey.
2055 (1593)So all the men urged Jason to select
the finest of the flock and sacrifice it
and thus propitiate the god. He picked out
a sheep at once, held it above the stern,
and slaughtered it, proclaiming:

“Helpful god,
2060whichever power it was that has appeared
upon this shorefront, whether holy Triton
Soothsayer of the Sea or Nereus
or Phorcys (as your ocean-dwelling daughters
address you), please be favorable and grant us
2065a heartwarming conclusion to our journey.”

While he prayed, he slit the throat and dropped
the victim from the stern into the lake.
Triton in answer surfaced, undisguised
and in his sacred person, from the depths.
2070 (1604)As when a trainer who has led a stallion
onto the broad arena of the games
takes bushy mane in hand and jogs beside him,
and the horse obeys his master, head
upreared with mettle, and the foam-flecked bit
2075clinks as he champs it side to side, so Triton
took hold of hollow *Argo*’s sturdy stern post
and pushed her toward the sea.

His upper parts—
head, back, and torso—perfectly resembled
the gorgeous bodies of the blessed gods,
2080but from the abdomen on down extended
the forking tail of an aquatic creature.
He slapped the surface of the lake with fins
that, farther out, divided into spines
curved like the tapers of a crescent moon.
2085 (1617)He pushed the ship a good long ways, launched her
across the surface, then abruptly plunged
into the depths. As they beheld, up close,

this awesome miracle, the heroes broke
into a cheer.

There is a stretch of coast
2090known as the *Argo's* Harbor to this day.
Signs of the ship are there, as well as shrines
set up to honor Triton and Poseidon
because the heroes rested there that day.
At dawn, a healthy Zephyr in their sails,
2095they cruised along, keeping the desert coastline
off to their right. Next morning they discerned
a jutting headland and the gulf that stretches
beyond it. All at once the Zephyr died.
A stiff south wind had risen, and their hearts
2100 (1628)rallied before it. Once the sun had set
and Hesperus the herdsman's star had risen
(the one that brings tired plowmen home from work),
then, when the evening breezes died away,
they furled the sails, stepped the tall mast down,
2105and heaved upon the sanded oars all night
and through the day and still were rowing, rowing
when daylight came around again.

From there
the distant, rugged island of Carpathus
received them and from there they had intended
2110to cross to Crete, which is of greater size
than all the other islands in the sea.
Talus, however, stood there on the shore—
a giant wholly made of bronze. He broke
sharp rocks from jagged cliffs and held them up
2115 (1640)as threats to keep the Minyans from mooring
once they had sailed into the bay of Dicte.

Long, long ago ash trees had given birth
to men of bronze, and Talus was the last
still living in the age of demigods.
2120The son of Cronus gave him to Europa
to guard the island. Three times every day
he strode the coastline on his brazen feet.
All of his limbs and body were of bronze
impenetrable, all except the vein
2125that carried blood down through the ankle tendon.
The tender film across it meant the limit
of life and death for him. The heroes, though,
subdued already by their own exhaustion,

quickly rowed the ship away from land
2130 (1651) in terror. And they would have fled from Crete
in a distress of thirst and agony
had not Medea said as they were leaving:

“Listen. I think that I can kill that man
all by myself, whoever he might be,
2135 yes, even if his body is entirely
made out of bronze, so long as he is not
invulnerable. Come, then, friends, and hold
the *Argo* steady here outside his range
until he yields and tumbles down before me.”

2140 So said Medea, and they worked the oars
to hold the ship steady outside his range,
and everyone was eager to discover
what sort of spell she would employ. She draped
a doubled purple veil before her face
2145 (1664) and mounted to the deck with Jason holding
her hand and guiding her between the benches.

Once there, she sang hypnotic lullabies,
praising the heart-devouring Fates of Death,
Hades’ intrepid monster hounds, who range
2150 abroad in air to hunt the living down.
In her entreaty she pronounced their titles
thrice in incantation, thrice in prayer.
Then, putting on a wicked cast of mind,
she hypnotized the eyes of brazen Talus
2155 and held him helpless in her hostile glare.
Grinding her teeth in earnest anger, then,
she hurled homicidal ghosts his way.

Father Zeus, profound astonishment
has stormed my mind—to think that death can come
2160 (1674) not only through disease and injury,
but people can undo us from afar,
just as that man, though made of bronze, surrendered
and fell down underneath the far-flung onslaught
of that ingenious conjurer, Medea.

2165 Just as he heaved a stone to block the heroes
from reaching anchorage, he scraped his ankle
across a jagged rock, and all the ichor

drained from him in a rush like molten lead.
No, he did not long stand astride the outcrop
2170but like a massive tree atop a mountain,
a Cretan pine that woodcutters had only
cut half through with their axes and abandoned
when they started back down through the forest,
and then the breezes shake it in the night
2175 (1686)and then it snaps off at the trunk and comes
rumbling earthward, so did Talus totter
this way and that way on his stubborn legs
and then at last lost balance, toppled sideways,
and landed with a crash as loud as thunder.

2180So in the end they spent the night on Crete.
When daylight came again, they built a shrine
in honor of Athena the Minoan,
drew water, and embarked, eager to row
quickly beyond the Salmonian cape.

2185But as they crossed the spacious Cretan Sea,
a deep and nightlike darkness called the "Shroud"
swept down and frightened them. No constellations,
no moonbeams penetrate its deathlike blackness.
No, it was like the depths fell from the sky
2190 (1698)or an abyss had risen from the depths,
and they themselves no longer knew if they
were on the waves or down in Hades' hall.
Left without options, they could only trust
the sea, wherever it might steer their course.

2195So Jason raised his palms and cried *Apollo!*
Apollo! summoning the god to aid them,
and tears were falling from him in his grief.
He vowed to offer many gifts at Pytho,
more at Ortygia, and at Amyclae
2200countless gifts. And you, O son of Leto,
ready of ear, came swiftly down from heaven
and settled on the Melanteian rocks
that crop out of the ocean. Perched upon
one of the pair of summits there, you brandished
2205 (1709)in your right hand a golden bow from which
a dazzling light shot out in all directions.

A tiny island then appeared to them,
one of the Sporades beside the small

Isle of Hippuris. There they dropped anchor
2210and waited for the light of dawn. At daybreak
they cordoned off a plot of land as sacred
in honor of the god and built a shrine
under the shade of trees. They also coined
a title there, Apollo God of Radiance,
2215because his beams were radiant, and they named
that barren isle Epiphany because
the god revealed it to them, like a vision,
when they were sunk in fear.

The men could only
offer the god the paltry sorts of things
2220 (1720)sailors marooned on desert shores could offer,
so, when Medea's Phaeacian handmaids
saw them decanting liquid offerings
of water on the blazing altar fire,
they couldn't keep the laughter in their chests
2225since they had only ever seen expensive
ox offerings at Alcinoös' palace.
Delighted by their taunts, the men responded
with crude suggestions, and delightful insults
and sweet harassment sparkled back and forth
2230among them. So, because of all this humor,
the women on that island to this day
fling naughty innuendos at their men
whenever in their holy sacrifices
they toast Apollo God of Radiance
2235 (1730)and Guardian of the Isle Epiphany.

When they had loosed the cables, and the weather
was fair, Euphemus happened to recall
a dream that he had dreamed one night, a dream
sent down to him by Maia's famous son:
2240it seemed that he was clutching to his breast
a clod of earth, a sacred gift, and white
droplets of milk were somehow nursing it,
and from the clod, small as it was, emerged
what seemed a maiden. Ravenous desire
2245took hold of him, and he made love to it
but afterward cried out in lamentation—
he felt as if he had deflowered the daughter
he had been nourishing with his own milk.
Soon, though, the figure said to reassure him:

2250 (1741)“Dear friend, I am the child of Triton, nurse
of all your heirs-to-be, and not your daughter,
no, Libya and Triton are my parents.
Please hand me over to the Nereids
beside the island of Epiphany.
2255I later shall emerge into the sunlight
and be the grounds for all of your descendants.”

Euphemus had retained this night encounter
within his memory and now divulged it
to Jason. Jason thought the dream resembled
2260an utterance of the Archer-King Apollo,
and he himself proclaimed the prophecy:

“Dear friend, a glorious destiny awaits you.
Once you have thrown this clod into the sea,
the gods will make an island out of it,
2265 (1752)and there your children’s children shall reside.
The sea god Triton graced you with the earth,
a piece of Libya, as a parting gift—
it was none other of the deathless gods
than he who gave it to you when he met us.”

2270So Jason read the omen, and Euphemus
did not invalidate his friend’s prediction.
No, giddy with the prophecy, he flung
the clod of earth into the sea and from it
emerged the sacred island of Callista,
2275the nursemaid of Euphemus’ descendants.
In former days they lived on Sintian Lemnos
but, driven thence, they settled down in Sparta
as hearth friends. Then, once they had moved from
Sparta,
Theras, Autesion’s distinguished son,
2280 (1763)guided them to this island of Callista
and named it Thera after his own name.
But all this happened generations after
Euphemus.

After this they swiftly left
the great expanse of sea astern and landed
2285on Aegina. At once they set about
a friendly contest over fetching water
to find out who could draw it and return it
first to the *Argo*, since the stiff tailwind

and hope for home were urgent. To this day
2290 the Myrmidons compete with big jugs full
of water on their shoulders, sprinting round
a track, light-footed, seeking victory.

O heroes, offspring of the blessed gods,
look warmly on this work, and may my song
2295 (1774) grow sweeter year by year for men to sing.
No further trials befell you once you sailed
from Aegina, no other gales opposed you,
so I have now arrived at your adventure's
glorious conclusion. After gladly passing
2300 the land of Cecrops, Aulis in Euboea,
and the Opuntian cities of the Locrians,
you landed on the beach of Pagasae.

Notes

ABBREVIATIONS

fr. fragment

frr. fragments

Gr. Greek

Pf. R. Pfeiffer, ed. *Callimachus*. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949–53.

PMG D. L. Page, ed. *Poetae Melici Graeci*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.

V. E.-M. Voigt, ed. *Sappho et Alcaeus: Fragmenta*. Amsterdam: Plak and Van Gennep, 1971.

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BOOK 1

- 1.1** *from you, Phoebus Apollo*: The *Argonautica* begins and ends (*Argonautica* 4.2293–2302) with poetic gestures that mark it as a traditional Greek hymn, one of the many indications of generic complexity of the poem.
- 1.7–8** *Pelias had received / a prophecy*: The background to the poem is given as a very short summary, set between parts of the proem: a feature of Hellenistic poetry is variation of emphasis.
- 1.28** *Past poets*: Interestingly, we do not have any evidence about whom the poet refers to here, whether individual poets, poems, or a larger poetic tradition.
- 1.34** *surrogates of my song*: One of the most enigmatic and debated phrases in the poem. It is clear, however, that the poet is in some way repositioning himself in relation to the Muses, traditionally figured as the direct source of the poet's artistic inspiration, as the opening lines of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* both demonstrate.
- 1.35** *Orpheus is the first*: Catalog is a traditional feature of the epic genre. Whereas the Catalog of Ships in Homer's *Iliad* assembles multiple leaders and peoples, Apollonius' catalog of heroes figures individuals who man *one* ship, the *Argo*.
- 1.36** *Calliope*: The Muse frequently figured as the patron of poetic song, Calliope appears here in the context of the epic narrative as the mother of Orpheus, often thought to be the first poet.
- 1.43** *still today*: A standard feature of Hellenistic poetry is the *aetion*, or "origin" of, among other things, contemporary natural phenomena, animal behavior, and cult practices. Apollonius' contemporary Callimachus composed a four-book poem, his *Aetia*, that interweaves a series of individual etiological narratives. There are many *aetia* in Apollonius' poem.
- 1.90** *he sank into the earth*: One of many fantastical moments in the poem. The

Argonautica is something of a combination of the heroic and the fantastical (rather like the narrative of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*).

- 1.95 *the sacred signs exhibited by birds*: Augury through reading the flight or sounds of birds was a standard practice in Greco-Roman antiquity. A recently discovered papyrus roll of short poems attributed to Apollonius' near-contemporary poet Posidippus includes a section of poems on bird omens.
- 1.121–22 *Libya, a land / as far from Colchis*: A possible learned double entendre, as the Colchians were sometimes thought to be originally Egyptian (Herodotus 2). The image may be a subtle allusion to the extent of the Ptolemaic Empire at the time of Ptolemy II.
- 1.135 *Peleus*: The father of Achilles, hero of the *Iliad*. An ongoing leitmotif of the poem is that the legend of the *Argonautica* occurs chronologically *before* the Trojan War, while Apollonius' poem is composed many generations later than the *Iliad*.
- 1.165 *the Argo was the most remarkable*: The construction of the *Argo*, the story *not* told in the opening of the poem, is invoked repeatedly in the course of the hexameter narrative.
- 1.190 *Hylas*: The hero's attendant is to be the cause of Heracles' separation from the expedition. The reference here, juxtaposed to that of Heracles' taskmaster Eurystheus, creates an ironic foreboding of what is to happen later in *Argonautica* 1.
- 1.288 *offspring of Hephaestus*: Hephaestus' hobbled feet are the source of laughter among the gods at the conclusion of the first book of the *Iliad*. Hephaestus' hobbled feet are a sign of his parents' wrath, those of Palaemonius rather one of the distinction of a divine father.
- 1.312 *a wonder to behold*: The Argonauts include among their number both the heroic and the fantastical, as befits a ship that has the power of speech.
- 1.319 *Argus*: With the shipwright of Athena, we return to the launching point of the catalog, the note that the poet would not sing of the ship's building, but of its heroes.
- 1.323 *"Minyans"*: Apollonius attempts here to clarify a problem in ancient genealogy regarding early southern Thessaly and northern Boeotia, to which he returns twice later in the poem, giving two other explanations. We do not know that all three of these explanations carried equal weight for the poem's audience. This one, that most of the heroes are descended from the shadowy figure Minyas, seems exaggerated (some certainly are: that Alcimide was descended from Minyas is found in Stesichorus).
- 1.378 *As a lonely maiden*: Apollonian similes are a fascinating enhanced development of Homeric ones, often with unusual implications within the surrounding narrative. Alcimide, through the possible loss of her son, risks being left a helpless and mistreated dependent.
- 1.425 *Think of Apollo*: The simile influences Virgil's description of Aeneas as Apollo at *Aeneid* 4.143–50. Apollo thus informs the poem as patron god of song, figure of comparison, and through his own two appearances as himself. The comparison of Jason to Apollo, and of Medea to Artemis in *Argonautica* 3, lends a particularly complex character to their eventual union.
- 1.456 *the course he thought most prudent*: One of many moments that mark Jason as cautious, a potentially ambivalent value in a traditionally heroic setting.
- 1.468 *mighty Heracles*: The heroes first choose Heracles as their leader, a moment that problematizes Jason's position among the assembled men and is indicative of a contrast of heroic types: managing details and alliances are not Heracles' standard attributes.
- 1.498 *the tasks at hand*: While eschewing to narrate the building of the *Argo*, the poet

gives a detailed description of embarking the ship. A primary model for the scene is Odysseus' building of the raft in *Odyssey* 5.

- 1.540–41 *divvying / the benches*: Apollonius' response to an oft-repeated Homeric "set scene." Such scenes of eating, dressing, sleeping, and rising are a standard feature of Homer, and a characteristic of oral poetry.
- 1.625 *like a man in sorrow*: Jason's thoughtful, often reflective nature is at odds with the behavior of many an epic hero, as Idas' challenge here illustrates.
- 1.663 *forecast with your prophet's art*: A main model for this scene is Eurymachus' mistreatment of the seer Halitherses at *Odyssey* 2.178–80.
- 1.675 *He sang of how the earth*: Orpheus' cosmogony ("origin of the world") is a reflection of earlier cosmogonic hexameter poetry. Orpheus was himself thought by many to have been the first poet.
- 1.742 *the gods looked down from heaven*: Another Apollonian response to a repeated Homeric scene, where the gods' major pastime in the *Iliad* is as spectators of the events on the battlefield. This is the only such scene in the *Argonautica*.
- 1.754 *infant Achilles*: The moment is emblematic of the poem's relationship to the Homeric epics. The *Argonautica* saga is of an earlier generation than the Trojan War, while Apollonius' poem is composed after, and in light of, the Homeric epics.
- 1.774 *Fish both big and small*: A fragment of the lyric poet Simonides (*PMG* 567) tells of Orpheus charming the birds and fish with his song, and suggests that Apollonius may well have had Simonides in mind here.
- 1.837 *Hipsipyle*: Earlier treatments of Hipsipyle and the Lemnian women include Aeschylus and Euripides. Considerable fragments of the latter's play are extant. Callimachus (fr. 226 Pf.) also treated this story.
- 1.843 *Oenoa*: This unusual *action* plays, in chiasmic form, with the possibilities of etiological transformation: Oenoa becomes Sicinus, Oenoa bears Sicinus.
- 1.874 *why have I digressed so widely*: One of several moments where the poet marks that his is not a continuous, linear treatment.
- 1.971 *Over either shoulder*: The description of Jason's cloak is a remarkable *ecphrasis*, a description of a work of art, or of a natural phenomenon in the manner of a work of art, in ancient Greek poetry. Over his shoulders Jason places seven scenes of Greek mythology; the final one blends into the *Argonautica* narrative—Phrixus is the father of the four Colchians whom the Argonauts encounter in Book 2.
- 1.998 *the shield of Ares in her hand*: Throughout the poem Apollonius plays on the reader's familiarity with the narrative told in *Odyssey* 8 of the love affair of Ares and Aphrodite, and Hephaestus' punishment of the errant couple. Aphrodite gazing at her own reflection is a standard theme of Hellenistic art.
- 1.1024 *Phrixus*: Son of the Boeotian king Athamas (who is Jason's great-uncle), Phrixus is driven, together with his sister Helle, by a cruel stepmother to flee on the back of a golden ram. Helle falls from the ram's back, thus giving her name to the Hellespont. Phrixus arrives in Colchis, where the golden ram is sacrificed, its fleece left to be guarded by a dragon. It is this fleece that Jason and the other Argonauts are sent to obtain.
- 1.1039 *like the star*: The first comparison of Jason to a celestial body. These similes highlight both Jason as the object of the (particularly female) gaze and the potentially destructive power of Eros (Love).
- 1.1076 *a vicious plot of Cypris*: This episode, while part of a traditional myth, may have had particular resonance at the Ptolemaic court, where love and bloodshed were a feature of the lives of the reigning family.
- 1.1153 *Cypris Queen of Love*: An apparent but false ending to the heroes' quest, a traditional feature of epic poetry.

- 1.1156 *had Heracles not called them*: The isolation from Heracles is a theme that gains ground throughout *Argonautica* 1, leading to his final separation from the Argonauts at the end of the book.
- 1.1178 *As bees swarm*: While the simile has Homeric models, it is especially apt here in the context of the Lemnian women. Apollonian similes often have complex associations with the surrounding narrative.
- 1.1213 *and you have borne a son*: A passage Virgil may have had in mind in composing Dido's tragic lament at *Aeneid* 4.327–30 that Aeneas has not left her the succor of a child.
- 1.1233 *of which it is forbidden me to sing*: A type of religious *praeteritio* that allows just a hint of what cannot be told. Cf. Callimachus fr. 75.4–7 for a similar first-person injunction that breaks into a surrounding narrative.
- 1.1259 *savage Earthborn Giants*: The reference to the Earthborn Giants at once marks the island as primordial (so almost part of preheroic cosmogonic narrative) and underlines the early place of the *Argonautica* saga in Greek mythology.
- 1.1275 *the stone that served as anchor loose*: Another of many *aetia* in the poem, this one was also treated by Callimachus toward the end of his four-book *Aetia* (frr. 108–9 Pf.).
- 1.1299 *like Jason's*: Apollonius figures Cyzicus as something of a tragic double to Jason, hence the particular irony that Jason kills his young host—Jason's moment of epic heroism in the first book of the poem turns out to be one of unwitting manslaughter.
- 1.1322 *Jason's Way*: An *action* that marks the importance of mythohistory in Greek thinking about the past.
- 1.1380 *Just as he joined*: Cyzicus is killed at the moment of beginning a career as a heroic warrior, just as Jason's first act as a heroic warrior is to slay his host.
- 1.1425 *fastening a noose around her neck*: Cleite, in the manner of many female characters in Greek tragedy, hangs herself. On the tragic convention of women hanging themselves, see Loraux 1987.
- 1.1460 *Mother of the Blessed Gods*: The role of the Mother of the Gods (often figured as Rhea, or Cybele, or a combination of the two divinities) prefigures her role in *Aeneid* 9.
- 1.1559 *broke his oar*: Heracles' superhuman strength is ill-adapted to a cooperative effort like rowing—again his nature as a solitary figure sets him apart from the other heroes.
- 1.1600 *after dire Orion*: The simile is a particularly fitting one, since Orion, the solitary hunter, is cast apart from humanity (as a constellation), just as Heracles will shortly be separated from the Argonauts, and his solitary journey will appear around the periphery of the poem.
- 1.1607 *Hylas*: This figure appears in treatments by Apollonius' contemporaries Theocritus (*Idyll* 13) and Callimachus (*Aetia* frr. 24–25 Pf.), as well as the Roman poets Propertius (1.22) and Valerius Flaccus. In Apollonius' treatment, unlike Theocritus', the relationship of Heracles and Hylas is not specifically an erotic one.
- 1.1637 *how flush with beauty*: A recurrent feature in Apollonius' poem is the female erotic gaze, here of the water nymph on first catching sight of Hylas. Apollonius has a marked interest in the female psyche, which he develops to the greatest extent in his treatment of Medea in the third and fourth books of the poem.
- 1.1648 *so her right hand tugged*: A scene, oft repeated in Western art, of transference between two worlds, a motif with which Ovid was to excel in the *Metamorphoses*. The initial mirror scene in *Alice Through the Looking-Glass* would be a well-known modern parallel.

- 1.1686 *goaded by a gadfly*: The gadfly (Gr. *myops*) image recurs in the appearance of Eros at Aëtes' palace in *Argonautica* 3. The simile here in *Argonautica* 1 is thus a very subtle suggestion on the poet's part of the relationship of Heracles and Hylas.
- 1.1746 *Glaucus*: This part-wondrous figure appears to "interpret" the gods' will to the heroes of the *Argo*; the Greek term *hypophetes*, "interpreter," recalls the poet's address to the Muses in the opening of the poem, and creates an understated moment of almost ring composition.
- 1.1818 *they rowed ashore*: Although there is no proem to the second book of the *Argonautica* (unlike Books 3 and 4), Jason's moment of landing forms a metapoetic closure to the first book. The second book likewise concludes with such a moment of disembarking.

BOOK 2

- 2.1 *Haughty Amycus*: The savage Bebrycian king is the antithesis of the correct host, and so takes on something of the role of the Cyclops Polyphemus in *Odyssey* 9. Apollonius' contemporary poet Theocritus also narrates the boxing match of Amycus and Polydeuces in *Idyll* 22 (see Introduction).
- 2.13 *who they might be*: Inquiring of a guest's origin and purpose is one of the standard features of correct *xenia*, or guest-friendship, a central social relationship in ancient mythology (and one that ensures safe travel). Cyzicus is, tragically, a correct host: Amycus is the opposite. Both come to terrible ends, the latter deservedly.
- 2.27 *Polydeuces*: Polydeuces is the immortal brother and twin of Castor (their sisters are Helen and Clytemnestra, the wife of Agamemnon). He answers to the call to engage in a brutal athletic combat, rather than Jason, another moment where the narrative problematizes Jason's role as leader of the Argonauts.
- 2.46 *they had found a spot*: Boxing is an ancient sport for which there were contests at Pan-Hellenic games, and which was celebrated in ancient art and literature. Here, however, "civilized" athletic competition is turned into mortal combat.
- 2.55 *like the star of heaven*: Heroic comparisons to celestial bodies, a standard feature of heroic vocabulary, usually refer to Jason in the *Argonautica*. The comparison of Polydeuces, as the subsequent description of his youthful appearance, again casts him in a role of something of a substitute for Jason.
- 2.90 *On a choppy sea*: This simile, which compares the forceful combat of the two fighters to the struggle of a ship and a powerful wave, is particularly effective given the surrounding narrative of the *Argo* and its struggle with forces of nature.
- 2.129 *Castor was first*: The combat between superheroes being over, Polydeuces' mortal brother, Castor, then enters the limelight. Castor and Polydeuces, the *Dioscuri*, are important gods in Alexandria, and they figure prominently in the promotion of Ptolemaic cult iconography.
- 2.164 *And as when beekeepers*: A remarkable juxtaposition of similes, one from herding, one from beekeeping, that have earlier epic antecedents but also reflect a vivid Hellenistic interest in didactic poetry, of which some lost examples include Nicander's *Georgics*.
- 2.184 *if Zeus had somehow left us Heracles*: Once Heracles has left the *Argo*'s enterprise, he will reappear in a variety of ways on the periphery of the narrative, in comparisons, missed sightings, and future references. Heracles' constantly present absence is one of the most striking features of Apollonius' "modern" epic.

- 2.203 *sang a victory ode*: A reference at once to the performed poetic art of *epinician* (poems sung in celebration of athletic victory) and to Hellenistic inheritance of the genre as both performed art and text; among the extant models of the *Argonautica* is Pindar's fourth *Pythian Ode*, composed in honor of Archelaus IV, king of Cyrene.
- 2.225 *Phineus the son of Agenor*: The story of Phineus, his commission of sacrilege and his blinding, bears strong resemblances to that of the Theban seer Tiresias. As in *Odyssey* 11, the seer's revelation, here of the course of the *Argo* through the Black Sea to Colchis, follows upon his being nourished, here by the Argonauts driving off the Harpies. There are also marked parallels with Callimachus *Hymn* 5, which tells of the blinding of Tiresias.
- 2.237 *Harpies*: These make a vivid reappearance in the third book of Virgil's *Aeneid*, where Virgil figures them specifically (lines 212–13) in their post-Phinean (and so post-Apollonian) existence.
- 2.312 *As soon as Zetes*: A fragment of the lyric poet Simonides (fr. 3 W.) may suggest (the text is very fragmentary) that Simonides treated of the brothers Zetes and Calais in his *Plataea Elegy*. This receives some support from a *scholion* (ancient commentary note) to Apollonius 1.211–15 (on Zetes and Calais) that notes that Simonides narrated the birth of the two heroes in his (now lost) *Sea Battle*.
- 2.364 *when their muzzles near the quarry's haunches*: The simile recalls something of the description of the golden brooch that the real (but disguised) Odysseus tells Penelope that he once saw Odysseus wearing (*Odyssey* 19.226–31).
- 2.372–73 *had not / swift Iris seen them*: In general, divine intervention in the *Argonautica* is rare, and markedly different from divine intervention in Homer (where gods appear to mortals in disguised form). Iris, the divine version of the rainbow, is something of an exception here, although again her appearance is rare.
- 2.398 *as people do in dreams*: One of several moments in the poem where Apollonius reflects a contemporary interest in the psychology of dreams.
- 2.406 *but what they do permit I shall reveal*: Phineus in his most Tiresias-like role. However, Tiresias foretells to Odysseus the future only *upon* his successfully reaching the island where the cattle of the Sun are pastured. The journey up to that point, beginning with the Sirens and the Clashing Rocks, is revealed rather by Circe at the opening of *Odyssey* 12, including her reference to the successful passage of the *Argo* (lines 70–72).
- 2.450 *into the Pontic Sea*: The geography of the Black Sea reflects Ptolemaic imperial interests in the area, and is dependent on a wide variety of models, among them Xenophon's *Anabasis*.
- 2.510 *everything from start to finish*: One of many moments of "Callimachean" metapoetics in the *Argonautica*. The poet, or here his spokesman Phineus, eschews a purely linear narrative in favor of an episodic one, with more attention to particular episodes.
- 2.543 *a second endless journey*: By this subtle sleight of hand, Apollonius introduces the possibility that the return journey will be by a different route than the outward one.
- 2.554 *the goddess Cypris*: Cypris (Aphrodite) plays a major role in bringing about the action of the third and fourth books of the *Argonautica*, but particularly the third. The reference to a second journey, and to Aphrodite's role in the fulfillment of the quest, thus introduces the themes of the third and fourth books, interestingly, in reverse order.
- 2.576–77 *if only light could shine / again*: It is worth noting that Jason's wish, as Phineus observes in his response, invokes an impossibility, what is often referred to as a poetic *adynaton*. This is another surprisingly awkward moment

in Jason's portrayal.

- 2.596 *Paraebius*:** The narrative (on first reading seemingly superfluous) of the figure Paraebius effects a remarkable parallel with Apollonius' contemporary poet Callimachus. Paraebius' father sacrilegiously cuts down a tree in which a nymph dwelt, as does Erysichthon, the mortal sinner of Callimachus *Hymn* 6 (to Demeter). The juxtaposition of Phineus and Paraebius reflects the heroes of Callimachus *Hymns* 5 and 6, and suggests that Apollonius knew these hymns in that order. See further in the Introduction.
- 2.619 *he had been paying*:** In Greek religious thought, *miasma* (pollution, sin) can be inherited as well as earned. Agamemnon in Aeschylus' play of that name is a classic example of a figure who both inherits the pollution of others and also brings about pollution by his own actions.
- 2.652 *the Etesian Winds arose*:** The Etesian Winds figure in Callimachus' *Aetia* (fr. 75), as does a mythographical history of the island of Ceos; the rape of Cyrene figures in Callimachus' *Hymn* 2. Cyrene will also appear at the end of *Argonautica* 4. Apollonius seems to be framing the Medea/Jason episode in a variety of ways.
- 2.678 *Dog Star Sirius*:** On his approach to Medea at *Argonautica* 3.1239–1243, Jason is compared to this destructive image. This is one of several moments of intratextual recall in the poem.
- 2.705 *Euphemus was the one*:** Euphemus recurs at the end of *Argonautica* 4, where again he holds a crucial element of future discovery in his hand, in the latter case a clod of earth from Libya that will transform into the island of Thera.
- 2.708 *Nor did Athena fail*:** One of the rare moments of divine intervention in the poem, mirrored by the action of the nymphs in *Argonautica* 4. Here, as will be true later in the book when the heroes catch sight of Apollo, the god appears in divine form.
- 2.791 *just as the gods had fated*:** An *aetion* that places the episode within a larger canvass of divine Fate. There is a striking parallel for this in the Phaeacians becoming stone on returning from delivering Odysseus safely to Ithaca in *Odyssey* 13.
- 2.813 *with subtle words and sidelong purpose*:** Modeled in part on Agamemnon in *Iliad* 2, the passage is one of several in the *Argonautica* that highlights political astuteness and diplomacy as desirable qualities in a leader.
- 2.863 *Imagine oxen laboring to furrow*:** One of many moments in Book 2 that prefigures what is to come later in the poem—here, the fire-breathing bulls that Jason will yoke as a feat of heroism in Book 3.
- 2.874 *"the morning twilight"*:** An hour that Callimachus evokes in a vivid description in one of the few longer fragments of his *Heacle* (fr. 74) as the "predawn."
- 2.877 *The son of Leto*:** A truly remarkable moment in the poem, in which the Argonauts catch sight of the god Apollo as himself. A similar moment of revelation occurs when Apollo causes light to shine for the Argonauts toward the end of *Argonautica* 4.
- 2.914 *a choral dance*:** The Argonauts perform a *paean*, a choral dance in honor of Apollo. There is a close parallel with this passage in Callimachus *Hymn* 2 (to Apollo), including the ritual cry *Hie, hie*. In both cases the poets have transposed a lyric poetic form into a hexameter narrative.
- 2.954 *a cave that leads to Hades*:** These lines both echo the shadowy opening of *Odyssey* 11 and prefigure the site of Aeneas' descent into the Underworld in *Aeneid* 6. There is, however, a crucial difference: in Apollonius the expected journey downward (Gr. *katabasis*) does not occur; rather, this is replaced by the ingress to the river Phasis and the land of the Colchians.

- 2.984 *Jason named the names*: An unusual moment of catalog poetry (a much-beloved art form in the Hellenistic world) where the narrative of the poem up to now becomes the material of the catalog. There is a striking and controversial parallel in *Odyssey* 23, where Odysseus recounts the adventures of the earlier poem to Penelope.
- 2.1048 *Tyndareus' sons*: An *aetion* that also prefigures Polydeuces and Castor becoming the *Dioscuri*, twin gods (to the Romans Castor and Pollux) associated particularly with sailing, and of great significance in Ptolemaic cult.
- 2.1059 *Idmon son of Abas*: The deaths of the two seers, Idmon here and Mopsus in Libya in Book 4, frame the Jason and Medea narrative.
- 2.1092–93 *Because / I heed the Muses' will*: Here Apollonius varies the outline of the poet's relationship with the Muses that he suggests in the last line of the poem's proem (Book 1 line 22). This variation on the traditional phrasing of the rapport poet-Muse is a recurrent motif in the *Argonautica*.
- 2.1112 *they collapsed*: The first of two scenes that find the heroes given up to despair; the second occurs toward the end of the fourth book in the Libyan desert. In both cases the heroes are roused back to action by female divinities, here by Hera, in Book 4 by the Libyan maidens. While Apollonius generally does not use the type of repeated scene that is a standard motif in Homer (e.g., particularly scenes of dressing, eating, going to sleep), his repetition of larger thematic structures is one of the striking compositional features of the poem.
- 2.1170 *the Nysaeon son of Zeus*: These lines briefly encompass the passage of the cult of Dionysus from India to the Mediterranean, one of the defining cultural evolutions of the ancient world.
- 2.1237–38 *their comrade / Heracles*: Again Heracles appears on the periphery of the poem's narrative. One of the models of this scene is Telemachus taking on the refugee seer Theoclymenus in *Odyssey* 16.
- 2.1304 *when a woman is with child*: On the anthropological phenomenon of male imitation of pregnancy and childbirth in antiquity, see Leitaο 2012.
- 2.1312 *Odd laws and customs*: These lines are almost a short poetic rendition of Herodotus on the everyday life and practices of the Egyptians as opposite to those of the Greeks (esp. Herodotus 2.35). This is particularly striking at this point in the *Argonautica*, as Herodotus tells us that the Colchians were originally Egyptian (2.104–15), a narrative that in turn makes the cultural engagement of Greek and Colchian in Apollonius' poem particularly relevant for the Greek rulers of Egypt. Another text implicated here is Xenophon's *Anabasis* 5.4.26–34 on the Mossynoeci, an important source for Apollonius' Black Sea narrative.
- 2.1323 *Their ruler sits inside the highest tower*: Xenophon's *Anabasis* 5.4.26 on the king of the Mossynoeci is one text that clearly influences Apollonius here.
- 2.1355–56 *Not even / Heracles*: Not only does Heracles continue to figure around the margins of the poem, but so do past narratives about him, as here.
- 2.1365 *let's all set on our heads*: The stratagem to overcome the dangerous birds in part recalls Odysseus' plot to prevail over the Sirens in *Odyssey* 12, even though the Sirens and the contest with them will appear again in *Argonautica* 4. Each incident, differently and in part, recalls the Homeric original.
- 2.1383 *so half the heroes locked their shields together*: This reflects an actual military practice to avoid onslaught of missiles, in the Roman army known as the *testudo*, or "tortoise."
- 2.1405 *The sons of Phrixus*: The encounter with the sons of Phrixus brings two parts of the narrative together, with outward journeys from Thessaly and from Colchis. The description of the shipwrecked Colchians recalls the shipwrecked Odysseus at the end of *Odyssey* 5, on the eve of the Phaeacian episode there,

and its recasting in Apollonius' poem.

- 2.1449 *and give us clothes*: The act of supplication, and request for clothing, recalls Odysseus' entreaty to Nausicaa in *Odyssey* 6, and here suggests that a reworking of that episode is about to occur.
- 2.1471 *The ram, you see, could talk*: These lines evoke the last scene on Jason's cloak in *Argonautica* 1, where the ram appears to speak to Phrixus (1.1025–27).
- 2.1548 *The man could rival Ares*: The comparison is especially effective, as Ares, the god of war to whom Argus compares Aeëtes, is the god at whose altar the new friends have just offered sacrifice. At the same time the comparison heightens the fearful prospect of interaction with the Colchian king.
- 97 2.1585 *and infant Zeus*: Zeus as infant returns in the description of the ball at the opening of *Argonautica* 3, another example of Apollonius' frequent doubling motifs.
- 2.1606 *Prometheus*: As the Argonauts earlier saw the god Apollo himself walking across the landscape, so here they pass by earlier Greek mythology, the punishment of the Titan who gave fire to man. As in *Argonautica* 4 they will pass by the still smoldering Phaëthon, the Argonauts effectively enact their own place in Greek mythology.
- 2.1645 *or whether other means*: Epic choices are usually presented (as the one opening *Argonautica* 4) as two options, of which the latter is the one taken. While that is also true here, the option is not yet spelled out, as the "means," Medea's infatuation for Jason, has not yet happened.
- 2.1650 *and so they spent the night*: Apollonius recalls Odysseus at the end of *Odyssey* 5, when the shipwrecked hero is finally able to sleep on land, thus creating a pause to one line of narrative as another is about to open.

BOOK 3

- 3.1 *Erato*: Erato is one of the nine Muses (Hesiod, *Theogony* 75–79), who comes to be associated with love poetry (this passage is an important moment in that development). Apollonius opens his third book with an etymology of the Muse's name. This third book has markedly lyric overtones, and there is a distinct change of narrative direction, which will change yet again at the opening of *Argonautica* 4. Virgil imitates the division of the poem into two halves with the invocation to Erato at *Aeneid* 7.37.
- 3.2 *Medea, Jason*: Whereas the Argonauts appear as a group in the proem of the first book, here the focus moves to Medea's love for Jason, and his success because of that love. The final two books center much more on these two figures, with Medea in many ways in the role of an epic hero. Among the highlights of the third book are the careful details of her thought processes.
- 3.9–10 *Athena / and Hera*: The action of the two goddesses recalls their combined plotting and martial enterprise at *Iliad* 8.350–96. Another important Homeric passage recalled here is Hera's approach to Aphrodite in *Iliad* 14 to borrow her erotic "zone," or "girdle."
- 3.50 *Hephaestus*: The absence of Hephaestus, and the description of Aphrodite alone in her bedchamber, lead the reader to suspect the possible presence of Ares, who is, however, not here (in spite of the image of Aphrodite and Ares' shield on Jason's cloak). The fatherhood of Eros was a notorious problem in ancient mythology, and one Hellenistic poets enjoyed playing upon.
- 3.69 *Before today*: Aphrodite's address recalls that of Charis to Thetis at *Iliad* 18.385–86, when Thetis comes to Hephaestus (here husband to Charis) to ask for new armor for Achilles.

- 3.87 *Jason proved his worth*: Hera's short narrative here fills in a gap in the brief parenthetical background passage at *Argonautica* 1.5–17, and underlines the opening of Book 3 as a new beginning.
- 3.121 *little Eros*: In pre-Hellenistic Greek literature, Eros is often depicted as young, but not as a little boy. The Hellenistic period, however, shows a marked interest in children and their portrayal.
- 3.159–60 *Little Eros / stood clutching*: This image recalls a passage of the poet Anacreon (PMG 398), a poet whose images of Eros as competitor had much appeal for the Alexandrians.
- 3.174 *A nice bright ball!*: This is one of the remarkable *ecphrases* in Apollonius' poem, and it has a variety of scientific, poetic, and philosophical implications (particularly of the pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles). Apollonius' contemporary Eratosthenes of Cyrene (276–194 BCE) is credited with inventing the armillary sphere or globe. Aratus' *Phaenomena* 525–36 is a close parallel to this passage.
- 3.208–9 *Thence / opens the downward path*: Eros' descent in some ways parallels that of Hermes to Calypso in *Odyssey* 6, where Hermes is also on a divine mission. In a moment of Apollonian variation, the expected simile (e.g., to a gull in descent) is absent.
- 3.262 *Circe's Plain*: Burial customs are a common feature of ancient ethnography, the one here a sign of the otherworldly realm the Argonauts are entering.
- 3.275 *Hera helped*: The model here is the mist Athena casts around Odysseus at the opening of *Odyssey* 7, so that he may enter the palace of Alcinoös undisturbed. Virgil uses the same feature at *Aeneid* 1.411–14.
- 3.286 *They softly crossed the threshold*: The description of the palace of Aeëtes is based in part on that of the palace of Alcinoös at *Odyssey* 7.81–132, with some striking enhancements. Whereas Hephaestus fashioned gold and silver dogs for Alcinoös, for Aeëtes these are fire-breathing bulls, which prefigure the plowing scene later in *Argonautica* 3.
- 3.318 *"Phaëthon"*: Phaëthon is the name of the son of Helios, and his smoldering corpse figures in the Italian part of the Argonauts' return in Book 4. That Absyrtus is called "Phaëthon" allows for the poet's etymology of the name here, but also introduces a somewhat sinister undertone suggestive of the boy's tragic fate later in the poem.
- 3.331 *she shrieked*: Medea's first utterance in the poem is one of alarm. The passage evokes Andromache hearing the tumult over the dead Hector. Here the immediate recognition, Chalciope seeing her sons safely returned, is one of joy, but the passage's tone bodes ill for the future.
- 3.359 *And Eros was descending*: This remarkable opening is a variation on the Homeric poetic feature known as ring composition. We return to the descent of Eros at 217. At the same time there is a transition from epic (a multitude of figures busy at court) to lyric mode, that of a single figure's perception and reaction.
- 3.361 *stinging fly*: This same image occurs toward the end of Book 1, describing the rage that overcomes Heracles on hearing about the loss of Hylas.
- 3.373 *Sudden muteness*: This careful description of the effect of erotic attraction on the psyche is one of several passages in Hellenistic poetry (another is the second part of Theocritus' *Idyll* 2) that imitate a famous poem of Sappho, fr. 31 V. ("that one appears to me like the gods"). Sappho's poem implicated several contemporary medical images. Hellenistic poetry, with its awareness of new interests in medicine, further enhanced Sappho's medical language and imagery.
- 3.382 *As when a workwoman*: This striking simile compares the fire of a lone woman

doing handiwork at night to Medea's isolated reaction on seeing Jason. While Homer had used comparisons of the heroic and everyday working culture, this simile takes the conceit a step further.

- 3.407 *my sister Circe*: Aeëtes' reference to his sister Circe conveniently locates her in the Greek west, thus pinpointing one geographical reference of the Argonauts' complex journey back home.
- 3.415 *Argus answered first*: Argus' surprisingly long speech serves as a summation of much of the past two books for the Colchian audience. Argus, though not the same Argus who designed the *Argo*, does include the building of the ship briefly in this summary, a building that Apollonius himself had consciously omitted in his opening to the whole poem.
- 3.528 "*Stranger, why should you tell*": Aeëtes, a figure within the poem itself, is in the unusual role of requesting narrative brevity, a hallmark of good poetry of this period.
- 3.587 *Jason shone*: Jason's physical beauty, and its effect on those who behold him, is an ongoing motif of the poem, as is its destructive potential.
- 3.718 *a timid dove*: This is another example of bird augury in the *Argonautica*. The dove is also associated with Aphrodite, so its landing in Jason's lap can be read as another instance of the erotic motif of this book.
- 3.741–42 *as fellow crewmen / to women*: Idas here takes the role Heracles had in Book 1 in reaction to the Argonauts' dalliance with the Lemnian women—an older heroic ethos disapproving of a newer one and its methods.
- 3.820 *She dreamed the stranger*: Medea's dream is in part an elaboration on that of Nausicaa which opens *Odyssey* 6, but here has a more complex nature, part exposition of Medea's desires, part prefiguring the future. Dreams and dream interpretation were a subject of great interest in antiquity.
- 3.848 *shameless as a bitch's*: The Greek term for "bitch" (*kyon*) marks this as an allusion to Helen's self-deprecating language in *Iliad* 6, where she laments her own actions in abandoning her homeland for a foreign love.
- 3.858 *She turned around, returned*: Apollonius' description of Medea's hesitation here finds a striking parallel in one of the most remarkable passages of Euripides' *Medea*, Medea's agonized soliloquy (lines 1019–80) on whether or not to kill her children.
- 3.867 *Think of a girl*: The simile varies a traditional epigram motif of the bride dead on the eve of her wedding, and so now the bride of Hades (Death). At the same time, it hauntingly recalls the hopeful young girls inspired by the Evening Star (the planet Venus) in Book 1.
- 3.908 *but no sound came*: The motif of speechlessness, first apparent on Medea's gazing upon Jason, continues here and will recur again as a leitmotif of the girl's internal turmoil.
- 3.925 *you must swear by Heaven and Earth*: Oaths, their preservation and their breaking, are a recurrent theme of the Medea narrative. Apollonius' audience may well recall that Jason's *not* keeping his sworn oaths is one of Medea's primary charges against him in Euripides' play.
- 3.1054 *So she resolved*: Medea's contemplation of suicide is another of the detailed portrayals of her inner psychology that make the third book so different in tone from much of the rest of the poem. There are some lyric antecedents (Sappho fr. 94 V. is one), but the continued description of internal psychology is something quite new.
- 3.1104 *Prometheon*: Prometheus, whose torment the Argonauts sailed past toward the end of Book 2, recurs here as the source of Medea's magic drug. Prometheus will return again at lines 1402–4 as the origin of Jason's family.
- 3.1123 *Brimo*: Brimo is an aspect of Hecate as Underworld deity. The Greek word

means “the one who roars.”

- 3.1139 *Leto's daughter Artemis*: Apollonius here reworks Homer's comparison of Nausicaa to Artemis at *Odyssey* 6.102–9, yet there is a significant change in tone with the fear that Artemis/Medea inspires here. Virgil recasts the same simile at *Aeneid* 1.498–504, again with contextual difference (Dido, unlike Nausicaa and Medea, has been previously married, so the comparison to Diana is intentionally problematic).
- 3.1192 *Never among the men*: Hera's rendering Jason an object of striking beauty recalls Athena's doing the same to Odysseus at *Odyssey* 6.229–37. The encounter of Jason and Medea here is a close intertextual recall of that of Odysseus and Nausicaa.
- 3.1205 *Crows regularly sit*: This passage is a somewhat humorous play on bird augury (reading divine will through bird motion or birdcall). Talking crows feature in another poem of this period, Callimachus' *Hecale*.
- 3.1229 *Medea's heart*: This passage again recalls Homer's scene with Nausicaa at play with her maids in *Odyssey* 6, although here there is no ball (the ball, as it were, already figured earlier in the narrative of *Argonautica* 3, and will appear again in a simile in Book 4). Medea's anguished anticipation of Jason's arrival also recalls, a second time, Sappho fr. 31 V.
- 3.1240–41 *as the Dog Star, / Sirius*: The comparison of Jason to the notoriously destructive hottest time of the year is one of brilliance and foreboding. There is a close parallel description of Sirius in Apollonius' contemporary poet Aratus at *Phaenomena* 326–35.
- 3.1276–77 *I have come, / a suppliant*: This is another close recall, with important variations, of *Odyssey* 6.149–85, where the desperate Odysseus supplicates Nausicaa. One intriguing variation is that in the Homeric passage Odysseus concludes by noting that a well-married couple achieves the greatest reputation (line 185); here Jason picks up the theme of reputation, but of two figures (line 1283) living apart.
- 3.1290 *Minos' maiden daughter Ariadne*: Jason's mythological choice of exemplum is full of foreboding: Theseus abandoned Ariadne, who had aided him in his quest to slay the Minotaur and then left her family and homeland with him, on the island of Naxos. Jason's version of the Ariadne story is geared to persuade and is also only partly true.
- 3.1317–18 *a miraculous / and winning fire*: This is often an image of a divinity, and appears in the iconography of some Hellenistic monarchs. Fire in this case, following on the Jason-Sirius comparison, has a dangerously ambiguous value.
- 3.1344 *to turn and look behind you*: In ancient magical practice, it is standard for the practitioner calling forth an Underworld spirit to beware of looking upon that which should not be seen.
- 3.1516–17 *Cadmus found / this serpent*: The narrative of Cadmus and the serpent's teeth links two of the great mythological cycles, that of the Theban royal house and the *Argonautica*. Like other Hellenistic poets, Apollonius has great interest in mythology.
- 3.1533 *The sun god Helios*: Helios here is both metaphor (for the sun) and a pertinent mythological presence as Aeëtes' father.
- 3.1552 *Lemnian Hypsipyle*: There are several mantles in the poem: Jason's cloak in *Argonautica* 1, which plays a role in the seduction of Hypsipyle; this gift from Hypsipyle, which figures here at the moment Jason carries out Medea's magical instructions; this same mantle then makes a reappearance in the luring of Absyrtus to his death in the first part of *Argonautica* 4; and then there is finally the mantle in which Dionysus embraced Ariadne, in which Jason and Medea make love in *Argonautica* 4. Each covering implicates earlier narrative or

narratives into the present.

- 3.1579 *a special gift from Ares*: Aeëtes and Ares, the Greek god of war, are again equated. This parallelism begins already at the altar of Ares toward the end of the previous book.
- 3.1590 *Phaëthon was waiting*: The image of this Phaëthon holding his father's chariot cannot but evoke the image of Phaëthon the son of Helius. Like the son of Helius, this Phaëthon will prove, in his tragic end, unequal to his father.
- 3.1597 *the god Poseidon*: The simile may serve to evoke particularly Poseidon the implacable foe of Odysseus, and to heighten the sense of Jason's heroic isolation here in the face of a foe truly larger than life.
- 3.1669 *Think of a blacksmith's bull-hide bellows*: The simile recalls in part the Cyclopes on Jason's cloak in Book 1 as they fashion the thunderbolt of Zeus.
- 3.1759 *the seedlings grown*: Many editors assume a missing line between this line and the next.
- 3.1785 *The sun went down*: Again a book concludes with nightfall. Whereas the other books of the *Argonautica* cover longer periods of time, the entire action of Book 3 encompasses only a few days.

BOOK 4

- 4.1 *deathless Muse*: The poet does not name this figure. Some scholars assume this to be Erato, the Muse of the proem to *Argonautica* 3, and that this is one of several factors that bind the two books as a unit, one that centers on Medea and Jason. Other scholars point to the different, more heroic-epic direction of *Argonautica* 4, especially as outlined in the proem, and suggest that this is rather a changed Muse, the typically unnamed one of epic poetry (cf. the opening lines to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*).
- 4.4 *wondering whether*: Questions in epic, as the late Thomas Rosenmeyer observed, are generally phrased as "x or y, then y." The second option usually prevails. See "Apollonius Lyricus," *SIFC* 10 (1992): 177–78.
- 4.14 *Hera, meanwhile*: Hera will continue to play an active role in this book of the poem. The simile that follows is a typically heroic-epic one, thus confirming the direction that the poem now follows.
- 4.26 *She would have drained*: The lines capture two features of Medea in particular: her emotions as a young girl (this is the second time she contemplates suicide), a strong feature of Book 3, and her role as a sorceress, which will repeatedly come to the fore in Book 4. The choice of action here reflects, on a different level, the change of direction the poem takes now from that of the previous book.
- 4.37 *heartfelt lamentation*: The final version of Callimachus' *Aetia* closes with the young queen, Berenice II, dedicating a lock of her hair for her husband's safe return from the Third Syrian War, a lock that itself laments its being severed from its sister-locks, and that ends up in a heavenly apotheosis in the lap of Arsinoë-Aphrodite, figured in cult terms as Berenice's mother. This is one of many striking parallels between the poetry of Callimachus and Apollonius' *Argonautica*.
- 4.41–42 *"I wish . . . / before you ever reached the land of Colchis"*: This is a very close echo of the opening two lines of Euripides' *Medea*. In Euripides' play these lines are spoken by the children's nurse. The difference of speaker underlines some of the conventional differences of tragedy and epic.
- 4.149–50 *sacrificed / the gilded miracle*: This image recalls the final one on Jason's cloak in Book 1, where the golden ram appeared to be speaking to Phrixus.

- 4.172 *a pile of smoldering wood*: This simile recalls the one in *Argonautica* 3 that compared Medea's initial passion to the fire a workwoman lights at night. The lyric-heroic division again comes forward; here Medea, in heroic mode, is subduing a dragon.
- 4.182 *Jason, terrified*: Jason's heroism is once again complicated by Medea's own superhuman action.
- 4.203 *Just as a maiden*: This brilliant simile is very revealing about Jason in multiple ways. The goal of the Argo's voyage is the "heroic" obtaining of a magical object, yet this is actually done by a woman, a local princess, through magic. The simile highlights Jason as object of desire, yet as a young girl; it both casts light on a new aspect of male sexuality (object of desire) and problematizes Jason as hero.
- 4.244 *"infamy of Greece"*: *Hellas*, "Greece," here is worth noting. The term, rare in Homer, does not appear in Homer's poetry for the conceptual space "Greece." As Thucydides famously observes (1.3), Homer does not make the distinction Greek vs. Barbarian. This marks Apollonius' poem, albeit before the Trojan War in mythological time, as a latter-day epic.
- 4.257 *as thickly as the dead leaves*: The simile is in part prophetic, as the Colchians who subsequently embark will not return to Colchis.
- 4.267 *His son Absyrtus*: With the reference to Helios a few lines earlier, we again recall the image of Phaëthon, who proves unequal to driving the chariot of his father Helios, as Absyrtus will not survive the attempt to replace Aeëtes at the head of the Colchian force that pursues Jason and Medea.
- 4.298 *Holy dread prevents me*: This is a reference to *aporreta*, elements of ritual that must be kept secret. *Aporreta* are a typical feature of initiation rituals, and also of magic and witchcraft.
- 4.307 *but what that route would be*: This is the key moment that allows for Apollonius' new return route for the Argonauts.
- 4.321 *the Apidanian Arcadians*: The Apidians appear in the opening section of Callimachus' *Hymn to Zeus*. Callimachus' narrative of Zeus' birth in Arcadia is reflected at several moments in this passage of Apollonius.
- 4.396–97 *ever had observed / seagoing vessels*: There may be an implied reference here to one tradition about the Argo, that it was the first boat.
- 4.442 *"Jason, what is this plot"*: Medea's speech here appears to recall, at several points, Medea's denunciation of Jason in Euripides' *Medea* at lines 465–519 of that drama.
- 4.469 *wretch*: The Greek term *sketlios*, "wretch," is an erotic leitmotif of this book, culminating in the address to Eros at line 565.
- 4.486 *Themis*: Themis is the divinity who oversees what is morally right, such as the validity of oaths.
- 4.533 *the sacred raiment of Hypsipyle*: Once again a piece of clothing is the instrument that instigates action, and this is again a gift.
- 4.565 *Wretched Eros*: The apostrophe of Eros is the culmination of the theme, one that pervades the second half of the *Argonautica*, of love leading mortals to commit wrongful acts.
- 4.586 *as a little boy*: This simile highlights Absyrtus' vulnerability, particularly at the hands of his sorceress sister.
- 4.605 *smeared his sister's mantle*: Murder of the innocent results in *miasma*, or pollution, and the potential for revenge by the Fury that arises from the blood wrongly spilled. Here Medea's being bespattered by her brother's blood (to take part in the killing of a sibling is a particularly grievous sin) is emblematic of the process of guilt and punishment imagined in Greek religion.
- 4.611 *and spat the taint out*: A widespread belief in many cultures that licking the

blood of the murdered will quiet a potentially vengeful spirit.

- 4.640 *people orphaned of a leader*: These lines are in part reminiscent of the situation in the *Iliad* upon Achilles' withdrawal from fighting. Not by chance are these lines spoken by Peleus—Achilles is his son.
- 4.691 *Heracles, you see*: Once again Heracles appears on the *Argonautica*'s periphery. The passage brings together two episodes in Heracles' life, which are perhaps best known now from two different fifth-century Athenian tragedies. One is Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*, in which Hyllus figures as an adult and wherein Deianeira, Heracles' last wife, in an attempt to recover her husband's love, is the accidental cause of his death. The other is Euripides' *Madness of Heracles*, which tells of Heracles' killing his wife, Megara, and their three children.
- 4.707 *a grazing herd of cattle*: There is a distant recollection here of one of the scenes on Jason's cloak in Book 1. All of the scenes on the cloak are recalled, in one way or another, in the course of the poem.
- 4.708 *Come, tell me, goddesses*: This new appeal at this point in the poem is a marked new beginning. Here Apollonius takes the Argonauts beyond the traditional narrative of their return ("so far abroad," line 714, is emblematic of this new narrative).
- 4.736 *queen Calypso*: Calypso in the *Odyssey* harbors Odysseus at the end of his first attempted return to Ithaca from Troy; we find him there at the opening of the poem. As the point from which he comes to the Phaeacians and begins his reintegration into mortal society, Calypso comes at the end of a series of marvelous figures, several of whom we will now encounter in *Argonautica* 4.
- 4.745 *one of the Argo's beams*: Although Apollonius declared at the beginning of the *Argonautica* that he would not narrate the building of the *Argo*, in fact the theme repeatedly resurfaces in the course of the poem, thus allowing for a different, more episodic than linear narration of what the poet himself claims to have been a theme already much treated by earlier poets.
- 4.765 *Phaëthon*: Phaëthon is a son of Helios, and so brother to both Aeëtes and Circe. On the one hand, the Argonauts are once again traveling by the visible remains of earlier mythology. At the same time, by evoking Phaëthon in Italy, Apollonius gives a kind of legitimacy to this part of the poem, where in fact he is traversing new terrain.
- 4.774 *the Heliades*: It is worth noting that Ovid, in the second book of his *Metamorphoses*, has Phaëthon, the Heliades, and Coronis in this sequence, although there are other figures as well.
- 4.850 *because a dream had troubled her*: Once again Apollonius makes use of the Nausicaa episode in the sixth book of the *Odyssey*, here bringing it together with the Circe episode in *Odyssey* 10. A dream is the cause of Nausicaa going to the river to wash the household clothing, and by the river she meets with Odysseus. Circe in *Odyssey* 10 lives apart in a forest, surrounded by animals into which she has transformed various mortal men. She fears Odysseus' resistance to her magic and enables his return. Here Circe is Medea's aunt, Jason has a foreign princess with him, and they are in need of ritual purification for a murder they have committed.
- 4.862–63 *some mélange / of limbs*: These are Empedoclean forms, a sort of primordial collage of parts, not entirely formed. Empedocles' influence is felt elsewhere in the poem, particularly in the ball that Aphrodite gives to Eros at the opening of *Argonautica* 3.
- 4.882 *and he alone escorted*: There is a reminiscence here of Odysseus' lone approach to Circe's house in the tenth book of the *Odyssey*.
- 4.902 *to expunge the deed's contamination*: In Greek religion, one guilty of murder must be first purified of pollution. This need for purification is separate from

any subsequent judgment the guilty may encounter (compare the case of Orestes in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*).

- 4.934 *in the Colchian tongue*: Homeric epic poems do not acknowledge a plurality of languages per se (the Trojans in the *Iliad*, for example, speak the same Greek as their Greek opponents). This reference to the "Colchian tongue" is a moment of later realism in an epic narrative, e.g., the Ptolemies ruled over many peoples, and these spoke many languages.
- 4.967 *Iris*: Iris is an anthropomorphic realization of the rainbow, and is frequently Hera's handmaid, often (though not here) to do Hera's will in a malevolent context.
- 4.974 *and summon Thetis*: Achilles summons his mother in the first book of the *Iliad*. Subsequently Thetis in *Iliad* 18 will go to Hephaestus to ask for new armor for her son. These are both recalled in this passage.
- 4.980 *Aeolus, who regulates the gales*: Aeolus, the keeper of the winds, is a figure from the tenth book of the *Odyssey*: he gives Odysseus a bag in which the winds are sealed, and on the approach to Ithaca Odysseus falls asleep, his men open the bag, and the winds are released, thus preventing them from reaching their homeland. In this passage Apollonius juxtaposes two figures from the two Homeric poems.
- 4.1011 *Scylla and Charybdis*: Two monstrous dangers from the twelfth book of the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus must choose between facing one or the other. Scylla and Charybdis represent the fearful dangers of the sea, in contrast with the Naiads, who are benevolent.
- 4.1013 *I myself have nursed*: Hera in the *Argonautica* has a rather different characterization from that of the *Iliad*, not to mention the wrathful figure of Virgil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Apollonius sketches a side of the goddess from the beginning of the poem that is protective and nurturing. Even in the various references to Heracles her malevolent role is much played down.
- 4.1032 *a heartfelt wedding*: This wedding is in fact the origin of the Trojan War. The goddess Eris ("Strife"), not invited to the wedding, casts a golden apple among the gods with the epigraph "to the fairest," which results in the judgment of Paris, which in turn leads to the abduction of Helen, and so on. But in the time frame of the *Argonautica*, where Achilles is still an infant, the Trojan War is yet to come, and the poet can decorously omit direct reference to the strife over the golden apple, though the opening of Book 3 is an elaborate allusion to this contest.
- 4.1042 *that he wed Medea*: This reference to the future, after-death marriage of Achilles and Medea, cannot but surprise the poem's audience, given that the second half of the *Argonautica* follows the love and early adventures of Jason and Medea. There is certainly an ominous note on the future of the relationship of the latter couple.
- 4.1121 *and raised a frightening cry*: The narrative of Thetis' attempt to make Achilles immortal closely follows the parallel scene in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, where Demeter, disguised as an old woman, is surprised by Metaneira as she attempts to make the latter's baby immortal through fire. Apollonius' reconfiguration of this scene emphasizes the different natures of Thetis and Peleus.
- 4.1141 *the clear-voiced Sirens*: The Sirens figure in the twelfth book of the *Odyssey*. Apollonius' use of many of the figures from Odysseus' wanderings draws the attention of his audience to the Odyssean quality of this part of the *Argonautica*, which features a journey into the unknown.
- 4.1148–49 *while she was still / unmarried*: A second reference, this time to the opening of the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, to Persephone as a virgin.

- 4.1157 *if Orpheus of Thrace*: In contrast to the *Odyssey*'s narrative of the Sirens, where Odysseus, bound by his men, listens to the Sirens' song, Apollonius has Orpheus compete with the Sirens, and Orpheus' song overpowers theirs.
- 4.1190 *had retired from the forge*: There is almost a partial ring composition here. We first hear of Hephaestus at his forge in the opening scene of the third book of the *Argonautica*, when Hera and Athena come upon Aphrodite alone. Indeed, one section of the fourth book, the voyage among the figures of Odysseus' voyage, is about to end, as did Odysseus', with the arrival among the Phaeacians.
- 4.1196 *As dolphins during tranquil weather rise*: The collection of Homeric hymns that Apollonius' contemporaries would have known began with the *Hymn to Dionysus* (now fragmentary), which features a famous metamorphosis of pirates into dolphins. It is unclear whether, and to what extent, that poem may be in play here as a model, but this passage, coming so soon after allusions to the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, is of particular interest in that regard, among others.
- 4.1216 *pick up a ball*: Another allusion to the Nausicaa episode in *Odyssey* 6, an episode that Apollonius plays upon again and again in the course of the second half of the *Argonautica*. As the Argonauts are shortly to arrive at the home of Alcinoös and Arete, the parents of Nausicaa (who has not been born at this time), the allusion is particularly appropriate.
- 4.1223 *Mighty Hephaestus stood*: Unlike the *Iliad*, which is replete with scenes of the Olympians watching the battlefield below, scenes like this in the *Argonautica* are rare. Here their presence marks this superhuman effort as truly extraordinary.
- 4.1234 *where Helius' cattle graze*: In a masterful stroke, Apollonius has the Argonauts pass by the cattle of Helius, the final, disastrous episode in Odysseus' wanderings before the shipwreck that brings him to the island of Calypso. His men's assault on Helius' cattle is the last episode that Odysseus narrates to the Phaeacian court, where Jason and Medea are now to find themselves.
- 4.1257 *Muses, forgive me*: The gesture is a particularly Pindaric one, when a poet alludes to, or briefly narrates, a myth involving unsuitable behavior among the gods. The passage is especially striking as a brief self-referential reference to the poet in the "act" of composition, and of the modern scholar-poet laying out two ancient explanations.
- 4.1265 *nursemaid of the Phaeacians*: Apollonius' own take on the history of the Phaeacians that Athena (in disguise) provides to Odysseus at the opening of *Odyssey* 7. Throughout the following episode, the audience is repeatedly reminded of the earlier version of reception among the Phaeacians and so of Apollonius' own recasting of this in his *Argonautica*.
- 4.1270 *Alcinoös and all his people*: In *Odyssey* 7, Odysseus, with Athena's aid, approaches the palace of Alcinoös in concealment, in part to avoid any maltreatment by the Phaeacians along the way. The arrival of the Argonauts is rather an occasion for initial public rejoicing, until this is interrupted by the arrival of the armed Colchians.
- 4.1290 *Alcinoös' wife Arete*: Odysseus, on arrival at Alcinoös' palace, first must supplicate the queen, Arete (her name means "virtue" or "excellence" in Greek). Her role in Odysseus' salvation remains fascinating and in part enigmatic and is the subject of a large scholarship. Here Medea, a young woman, supplicates an older female figure. While this is appropriate, there remains a certain paradox, as Medea is repeatedly likened, by allusion, in the second part of the *Argonautica* to Nausicaa.
- 4.1308–9 *a perfect / life*: Medea's prayer for Alcinoös and Arete thematically, though not verbally, echoes Odysseus' prayer for Nausicaa at the conclusion of his

supplication of her in *Odyssey* 6, which includes, at line 154, a reference to the blessed state of Alcinoös and Arete, Nausicaa's parents, whom Odysseus does not yet know.

- 4.1351–52 *a poor, / hardworking woman*: This simile recalls two similes in Book 3, that of Medea's initial erotic arousal compared to the fire a workwoman keeps at night, and the description of sleep coming to all, even to a mother who has lost her children. The reworking of the earlier similes into this one keeps alive the image of Medea's erotic suffering, now turned into true epic fear.
- 4.1389 *Antiope*: Antiope was the daughter (in one of several ancient mythical versions of her story) of the Theban king Nycteus. Beloved by Zeus, she bore him two sons, Amphion and Zethus, who were brought up by herdsmen. Persecuted by her father's wife, she flees to the house of two herdsmen, who turn out to be Amphion and Zethus. The story is the subject of Euripides' fragmentary drama *Antiope*.
- 4.1390 *Danaë*: Daughter of Acrisius. Zeus came to her as a shower of golden rain in the prison where her father confined her. Her father then placed Danaë, and her son Perseus, in a chest that he had cast into the sea. The story was narrated in lyric poetry by Simonides (fr. 543 *PMG*) and by Aeschylus in his fragmentary *Dictouloi* ("Net Drawers").
- 4.1393 *Echetus*: Echetus is a savage king of Epirus, father of Merope. The extant sources for this tale are fairly late. Arete here combines the catalog (an epic tradition) with a Hellenistic scholar's eye for contested narrative versions and/or unusual detail.
- 4.1406 *war down on Hellas*: As noted earlier, *Hellas* is not a term used of the Greek world in Homeric epic; rather, it is a coinage that comes to define Greek vs. Barbarian. A "war" on "Hellas" evokes the Persian Wars, and indeed Aeëtes, coming from the far east of the known world and associated with the Sun, can easily be aligned with the one-time Persian kings.
- 4.1450 *Zeus' Nysaeon son*: This is Dionysus, a god with whom the Ptolemies claimed close association. For a recent, somewhat novel and very accessible study of the spread of the Dionysus cult in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, see Hunter 2006 ch. 2.
- 4.1458 *glinting golden fleece*: The fleece has been a leitmotif throughout the poem, and we have seen it in several settings: as a living thing on Jason's cloak and as the guarded object that Medea and Jason take from its dreadful guardian. At its beginning the golden ram bears Phrixus and Helle away from their stepmother Ino, at its end here it serves as the bedding for Jason and Medea, the latter also fleeing a cruel parental figure.
- 4.1469 *The nymphs had come*: The setting of this wedding serves in turn as the model for that of Aeneas and Dido in *Aeneid* 4, where at lines 165–68 the woodland nymphs sing the wedding song, and Juno serves as the *pronuba* (matron attending upon the bride).
- 4.1483 *sang the wedding hymn*: A wedding hymn was a genre of lyric song, known as an *epithalamium* (the song sung "before the chamber"). There are several references in Apollonius' poem to other types of song, which may reflect the interest of his period in categorization of earlier poetry.
- 4.1485 *was not the place*: The passage leaves open a certain ambiguity about the wedding, and about whether it in fact constitutes a true wedding, leaving open, and unresolved, a very important issue for the future of both principals.
- 4.1491–92 *we / the members*: An unusual philosophical comment on the ephemeral nature of human happiness that, coming so closely upon the wedding, casts a pall on the whole scene.
- 4.1500 *Dawn had returned*: This is Apollonius' version of, and elaboration on, an

image fairly common in Homer, but not in the *Argonautica*. The lines here may be meant especially to recall the opening of *Odyssey* 8 and Alcinoös summoning the Phaeacian leading men to take counsel on the future of Odysseus.

- 4.1533–34 *dancing / a cyclic dance*: Another evocation of actual cult practice, and the type of song that accompanies it.
- 4.1555 *and settled on the island opposite*: Apollonius' poem includes a number of references to settlements and their future histories, a way of weaving history into an epic narrative. Callimachus does something very similar in his narrative of Acontius and Cydippe, in the third book of his *Aetia*.
- 4.1579–80 *the land / of Pelops had arisen into view*: This passage reworks Odysseus' first approach to Ithaca (*Odyssey* 10.29), when his ship is then blown off course by his followers' illicitly opening the bag of winds given to Odysseus by King Aeolus. The "dismal gust of wind" that blows the Argonauts off course is a recollection of the Homeric passage.
- 4.1645 *odd omens have been witnessed*: Ancient historical narrative often includes both natural and supernatural phenomena as testimony of difficult times. Here Apollonius is evoking that tradition.
- 4.1655 *fall in the sand, and die*: This is the second time that the heroes of the *Argo* have given up hope, and prepare to die. The scene, particularly with the shrouding of their heads, may recall the end of *Odyssey* 5, where Odysseus, exhausted and shipwrecked, buries himself, more like an animal than a human, to await a very uncertain future.
- 4.1665 *swans release their dying proclamations*: The idea that swans sing most beautifully before dying is a belief that recurs in a number of Greek authors, particularly Plato's *Phaedo*, which the poet may be in part recalling here.
- 4.1676 *the guardians of Libya*: These divinities are the daughters of Poseidon and Libya, thus their fitting role in bringing the Argonauts from Libya to the sea. The same group of female maidens (called "ladies, heroines of Libya") feature in an elegiac fragment of the poet Callimachus (fr. 602 Pf.) with their mother, here probably Cyrene. As is the case with Odysseus, the Argonauts are often helped in their return by female figures.
- 4.1770 *I sing at the Pierides' command*: The poet's recourse to the Muses' authority here marks both a debt to the epic tradition (an appeal to the Muses to give veracity to a more than human account (the Catalog of Ships in the second book of the *Iliad*, for example) and the extraordinary nature of the story. Bearing a ship to the sea has strong parallels in Egyptian religious belief and practice.
- 4.1796 *Heracles had already shot*: Once again the Argonauts are preceded by Heracles, whose peregrination just precedes their own. The description of Heracles from one of his victims at lines 1837ff. is an especially vivid one.
- 4.1833 *they emerged out of the trees*: There are several types of nymphs associated with trees in Greek belief. Apollonius is evoking something of that image here.
- 4.1912 *Then, O Canthus*: The deaths of Canthus and Mopsus continue a trend in the poem of significant deaths of heroes in pairs. As with the frequent paired arrivals at the poem's opening, this is particularly appropriate to a heroic narrative involving a ship and oarmates.
- 4.1941 *the lethal sort of asp*: Snakebite was a constant danger in North Africa, particularly from the asp. In some accounts of her death, Cleopatra VII commits suicide by holding an asp against her breast—this is the version popularized by Shakespeare. The poet Nicander (probably second century BCE) wrote a poem in hexameters, the *Theriaca*, on various creeping animals. The poem survives in its entirety; it includes a long section on snakes.
- 4.1956 *the Gorgon's freshly severed head*: The narrative of Perseus and the Medusa is

known to us from several ancient sources—the most familiar one is in the fourth book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*—but the myth is much older. Here Apollonius uses a traditional Greek myth to emphasize the earlier presence of North Africa in Greek mythology, a gesture very common in Hellenistic poetry.

- 4.1967 *Slumber the Loosener of Limbs*: Sleep and Death have a long tradition as partners, both in poetry and in art. Apollonius' description of the death of Mopsus is influenced both by earlier artistic tradition and also by medical descriptions of the effects of poison (the death of Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo* is a famous example of the latter).
- 4.1981 *and mourned the man*: The description refers in part to a *threnos*, or song of lament. An interesting feature of the *Argonautica* is the variety of song forms that this heroic epic evokes. A famous *threnos* in epic hexameter is the conclusion of *Iliad* 24.
- 4.1989 *As when a serpent*: This simile may evoke the Egyptian belief that the arc of the sun passes from west to east at night, while a serpent threatens its nightly voyage. On the presence of Egyptian culture and beliefs in the *Argonautica*, see esp. Stephens 2003 ch. 4; on this particular passage, see Mori 2008 Introduction.
- 4.2070 *As when a trainer*: The simile encapsulates the previous events (a stallion's emergence from the sea at lines 1749–55; now for a second time salvation comes from the sea).
- 4.2158 *Father Zeus, profound astonishment*: One of the great interests of poets of this period was paradoxography, the study of strange and unexpected phenomena.
- 4.2216 *Epiphany*: This episode of Apollo at *Anaphe* ("radiance"), which occurs here toward the end of the *Argonautica*, is one of the earliest episodes of Callimachus' *Aetia*, again suggesting a close knowledge of both poets of each other's work.
- 4.2230 *because of all this humor*: Laughter and the ludicrous have a place in many Greek rituals, including, perhaps most famously, the initiations at the cult of the goddess Demeter at Eleusis.
- 4.2237–38 *Euphemus happened to recall / a dream*: Euphemus' dream looks to the future, when Thera will in return become the source of the great cities of Cyrene. There is a longer narrative of the clod of earth at the opening of Pindar's longest ode, *Pythian* 4, which Apollonius places, significantly, toward the end of his own *Argonautica* narrative. The Hellenistic era took great interest in dreams and dream interpretation.
- 4.2289–90 *To this day / the Myrmidons*: The final *action* of Apollonius' poem. Like Callimachus' four-book *Aetia*, Apollonius' *Argonautica* is replete with *aetia*, and the two poems have many other shared features in common. Callimachus' elegiac poem, though, is not a linear narrative in the same way as Apollonius' *Argonautica*.
- 4.2293 *O heroes, offspring of the blessed gods*: The ending of the poem, like the opening line of the first book, is markedly hymnic. Here the poet addresses his heroes as figures of the distant past, and addresses them as objects of prayer themselves. It is they, the heroes, rather than the traditional Muses, whom the poet calls upon to watch over his song and its life in the future. In the ancient world heroes, such as Heracles or Jason, were themselves the objects of cult ritual as figures more than mere mortals but less than gods.

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